CROSSING BOUNDARIES

ESSAYS ON THE
ETHICAL STATUS OF MYSTICISM

G. WILLIAM BARNARD &
JEFFREY J. KRIPAL, EDITORS

Crossing Boundaries

Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism

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SEVEN BRIDGES PRESS
NEW YORK • LONDON

Seven Bridges Press, LLC
135 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

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Publisher: Ted Bolen
Managing Editor: Katharine Miller
Cover Design: Stefan Killen Design
Cover Art: Mark Rothko, *Red on Maroon*, 1959. Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY
Copyediting and Composition: Melissa A. Martin
Printing and Binding: CSS Publishing Company, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Barnard, G. William (George William), 1955-
Crossing boundaries : essays on the ethical status of mysticism / by G. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 1-889119-25-3 (pbk.)
1. Mysticism. 2. Religion and ethics. I. Kripal, Jeffrey John, 1962- II. Title.
BL625 .B375 2002
291.4'22—dc21

2001005521

Manufactured in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

by G. William Barnard

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, Jeffrey Kripal and I began attending a series of conferences sponsored by the Forge Institute, an organization founded by Robert K.C. Forman for those interested in mysticism and spirituality, both academically and existentially. During these conferences, which were relatively small and informal gatherings of scholars and professionals, one topic of discussion inevitably generated the most heated discussion among the participants: the relationship between mysticism and ethics. For hours, we would argue back and forth, struggling to articulate and defend often dramatically different understandings of the complex interweaving of mysticism and ethics. As the dust settled in the aftermath of these academic sparring matches, it became possible to make out the rough outlines of several primary foci of contention, perhaps best phrased as a series of interrelated questions:

1. *Is the reality allegedly experienced by mystics best understood as moral, amoral, immoral, or transmoral? Why?* Do mystics contact the same "reality" or even different levels of "reality"? If so, is the "reality" contacted simply psychological in nature, or is it, in some fashion, ontologically distinct from the mystic's psyche? Since many well-known mystics apparently have had powerful, sustained mystical experiences while, nonetheless, also have been known to engage in rather dubious behavior, does this behavior imply that the "reality" that these mystics contact is beyond good and evil? Alternatively, if the "reality" experienced by mystics *does* possess some form of moral or transmoral nature, then how is it possible to account for the profoundly antinomian behavior on the part of some mystics?

2. *Do distinct ethical stances emerge out of the metaphysical assumptions of mystics from various cultures?* Is there any truth to the stereotypical dichotomy that mystics of the West are theistic and ethical while mystics of the East are monistic and nonethical? Particularly in the case of nondual metaphysical systems, what are the difficulties of ethical reflection brought about by the mystical stress on

dissolution of the ego? That is, if there is no ethical agent, how can there be ethics?

3. *Does mysticism improve a person's character?* Is the mystical life, as many mystics claim, a way to move toward greater human capacities, such as greater love, wisdom, and power? That is, is mysticism an unfolding of latent human potentials and a way to reach some supreme goal of human existence? Or is it simply a convenient way to rationalize hedonistic excesses and abuses of power with a veneer of saintly piety? That is, is it a mask that hides narcissistic self-absorption or infantile regression? Are mystics enlightened teachers and models of love and wisdom or are they social parasites? By what criteria can we make this type of assessment? Are normative criteria applicable only within specific cultures, or are there cross-cultural standards for making this sort of appraisal? Even within the same culture, is it possible to find a wide range of different normative evaluations made about mystics?

4. *What is the best way to understand the relationship between mystical experience and transformations of selfhood?* Is the mystical dissolution of the separate self best understood as a way to expand beyond restrictive limitations; that is, is it a movement toward a truer, deeper wholeness? Or is this dissolution of the self really nothing more than a disintegration of valuable ego and ethical structures—a descent into the abyss of madness and perversion? Who makes this assessment and with what criteria?

5. *What is the link, if any, between mysticism and sainthood?* Is sainthood the pinnacle of mystical life or is it a nonmystical ethical ideal? That is, is sainthood a social construct in which the saint acts as an exemplar/icon for the tradition? If mystics are understood as highly ethical and/or saintly by members of their culture, is this positive transformation due to qualities that are inherent in mystical states of consciousness, or is this transformation due to the mystics' immersion in the religious and/or ethical ideals of their tradition?

6. *Why are so many mystics antinomian?* Is this provocative behavior a result of an attainment of a lofty state of spiritual freedom from social norms, or are these mystics simply corrupt and/or deluded?

7. *What, if any, is the link between mysticism and social change?* Does a profound mystical life lead to rejection of the world or to its transformation? Do societies that value the mystical life improve or disintegrate? What is the relationship between action and contemplation? In order to be understood as highly ethical, does a mystic have to be socially active (e.g., do mystics have to build hospitals or help feed the poor before their lives have social value)? Do the frequent criticisms made by mystics of social standards of morality and/or social ideals of the good life have any validity? As a result of these critiques, are mystics above criticism by members of their society? Or are the inherent ideals that prompt the mystical life themselves a cultural construct?

8. *What are the mundane, prosaic ethical implications of the day-to-day process of mystical life?* For instance, does the mystical life open one up to deeper levels of intuitive guidance? Do mystical experiences actually do what many mystical traditions claim, that is, do they help one to follow the will of Allah, help one to align with the promptings of the Spirit, or help one to flow with the Tao? If so, what are the advantages and/or disadvantages to this mode of ethical life?

This book initially began to take shape in the give-and-take of the lively, if relatively unstructured, arguments that arose as those of us at the Forge Institute thrashed out our respective positions on these and other questions. In the end, Jeffrey Kripal and I decided that the complex and fascinating relationship between mysticism and ethics deserved more sustained and detailed attention than a conference setting alone could provide—a decision that ultimately led to the creation of *Crossing Boundaries*.

As editors, we felt that there was a critical need within the academic study of mysticism to go beyond the typical epistemological focus of most recent scholarly texts on mysticism. *Crossing Boundaries* is, to our mind, a positive step in that direction. As a concrete and substantial introduction to some of the most important issues that arise in any serious study of the relationship between mysticism and ethics, it is our hope that it initiates further fertile explorations of the normative dimensions of the mystical life.

In our initial attempts to give a loose structure to *Crossing Boundaries*, Kripal and I began by proposing a working definition of both "mysticism" and "ethics" to all of our contributors—definitions that we assumed would be problematized in the course of their own essays. As an initial starting point, we defined "mysticism" as a process or way of life whereby the central purpose of an individual's existence is the ongoing attempt to have frequent, powerful, transformative, and often unitive experiences of a dimension of reality and/or selfhood that is understood by the mystic to be superior in value to the ordinary level of reality and/or selfhood. Similarly, we defined "ethics" as sustained and clear thought about the way life ought to be lived; that is, ethics is a mode of philosophical reflection on issues pertaining to moral rules and guidelines (i.e., "what should one do?") as well as a means to clarify issues related to the development of moral character and virtues in a human being (i.e., "what should one become?").

Because we understand mysticism to be a transformative (i.e., normative) process, an underlying assumption of *Crossing Boundaries* is that mysticism and ethics are intertwined, if in complex and ambiguous ways.

Crossing Boundaries is divided into three sections. In the first section, Kripal and I engage in good-natured academic debate in order to provide a context for a clear-cut, wide-ranging, energized articulation of the central issues that emerge whenever the intersection between mysticism and ethics is explored.

In chapter 1, "Debating the Mystical as the Ethical: An Indological Map," Kripal first offers a detailed and provocative exposition of some of the most important figures in the modern academic debate on the relationship between mysticism and ethics, focusing on seven seminal figures: Albert Schweitzer, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, R.C. Zaehner, W.T. Stace, Arthur Danto, Agehananda Bharati, and James Horne. He further comments on how the intersection of mysticism and ethics is affected by four recent developments in contemporary thought: (1) anthropological discussions of cultural variations in the understanding of the boundaries of the self; (2) feminist, psychoanalytic, gender, and gay theories (what Kripal terms "the return of the body"); (3) academic discussions of the problematic behavior of several prominent guru figures in Western culture; and (4) the environmental movement. Finally, Kripal makes explicit what was already present in the interstices and margins of his lengthy and subtle analysis: his own multifaceted position. According to Kripal, mystical experience (in particular, monistic mysticism) is in tension with any socially structured ethical system, especially subsequent to the rise of individualism that took place after the Enlightenment. Kripal also argues that, while mystical experiences are not inherently immoral, they are, nevertheless, often induced by immoral means or are catalyzed by tragic life experiences.

In chapter 2, "Debating the Mystical as the Ethical: A Response," I offer a rejoinder to Kripal's essay by pointing out the structural difficulties (as well as the strengths) of his position. My own alternative perspective on the interrelationship between mysticism and ethics can be summarized in the following manner: (1) Many mystics affirm a vision of "cosmic optimism," even while simultaneously affirming the reality (on some level) of evil and suffering; (2) The nondualism advocated by many mystical traditions (a nondualism that is not identical to a rigorous monism) promotes a type of "both/and" thinking that provides space for *both* individual responsibility *and* attunement with a level of reality deeper than the personality; (3) The thrust of profound mystical experiences is frequently toward positive psychological transformation, even if this transformation may be less visible than the eye-catching scandals associated with some recent spiritual teachers; (4) The transformative effect of mystical experiences is not guaranteed, but rather is dependent upon factors such as intent and social context; (5) There is, potentially at least, a great value to the contemplative life and/or the practice of spiritual techniques, even if this mode of praxis does not stress, at least overtly, the value of social change; and (6) The antinomian behavior of mystics can have several possible explanations. For instance, the mystic (even one who is supposedly quite "advanced") might simply be deluded or narcissistic. Or the antinomian behavior of the mystic may actually be quite appropriate to the situation, and may be, under the surface, guided by profound wisdom and love. I conclude my response with a critique of the work of R.C. Zaehner and Arthur Danto (as pre-

sented by Kripal) and then briefly note several overarching similarities in the ethical positions articulated in various mystical traditions.

The second section of *Crossing Boundaries* contains chapters that are historical or cultural in nature. These essays focus on case histories drawn from different religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese religions) in order to provide some concrete exemplifications of the complexities intrinsic to any serious study of the intersection of mysticism and ethics.

In chapter 3, "Beyond Good and Evil: Hypernomianism, Transmorality, and Kabbalistic Ethics," Elliot Wolfson offers a sustained, detailed immersion into Kabbalistic literature. Wolfson demonstrates that Jewish mystical thought affirms the social and ritual structure of Jewish law. He notes that the very attempt by Jewish law to divide the world into that which is permissible and/or encouraged and that which is forbidden, emerges from, and is a reflection of, the ontological structure of the Godhead itself, with its polar distinctions between good and evil, male and female, justice and mercy. Wolfson points out that human life, according to the Kabbalah, is understood to be, ideally, a reflection of these divine attributes. As Wolfson goes on to suggest, however, the nature of the Godhead is also such that this dualistic structure is in significant tension with the underlying unity that is also present within the divine. Therefore, within Kabbalistic texts, the question arises: How can an ethical life based on the radical differentiation between what is good and what is evil not be undercut by the mystical experience of the coincidence of opposites discovered in the heart of the Godhead? How can the mystical telos to transcend the dualistic limitations of good and evil not lead, inevitably, to antinomianism? Wolfson asserts that, for Kabbalists, the mystically fueled existential engagement with the limits of the law leads not to antinomianism, but to hypernomianism, where the thrust to surpass the law is always in tension with the need to fulfill it, thereby extending the law itself beyond its own limits. According to Wolfson, hypernomianism established the limits of the law at the very moment in which those limits are exceeded. From this perspective, breaking the law, at least in certain instances, itself paradoxically *affirms* the law, and a great deal of social good is created by that behavior which is seemingly unlawful. Hypernomianism, in this way, is not anarchy, but anarchic lawfulness; it is transmorality rather than immorality. Wolfson finishes his chapter, with a discussion of the link between speech and ineffability, drawing upon postmodern theories about the paradoxical relationship between speech and silence, presence and absence.

In chapter 4, "Above the Law: Mysticism and Antinomianism in the High Middle Ages," Richard Woods focuses on the complex interaction between mysticism and antinomianism in the late Middle Ages. Woods argues that mystics, such as Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerete Porete, and Meister Eckhart, did not advocate heresy and lawlessness, but rather exerted a moderating influence

on the social order of the time. Radical segments of several new religious movements (such as the peasants of the Swabian Ries, the Almaricians, and the advocates of the Free Spirit) were, however, in the true sense of the word, antinomian. Because these radical new religious movements appealed to the authority of various mystics to legitimize their revolutionary demands, the church and civil authorities were prompted to repudiate mysticism, a move, according to Woods, which in all likelihood served to intensify rather than curtail the social unrest of the period. Woods suggests that while, on a superficial level, similarities can be found between the rhetoric of the mystics and the revolutionary proclamations of the radical dissenters, in reality, their messages were profoundly different. While both advocated radical freedom, the mystical stress on self-transformation and social transcendence differed profoundly in structure and intent from the revolutionary call for the destruction of social structures promulgated by the radical antinomians. Woods, in the final section of his essay, not content simply to describe the historical and theological parameters of the complex intersection of mysticism and antinomianism in the late Middle Ages, also draws upon the work of various modern social theorists (Robert K. Merton, Bryan R. Wilson, and Peter Berger) as well as developmental psychologists (Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler) to explore various theoretical explanations for this conflation of mysticism and antinomianism.

In chapter 5, "The Infinity of Desire: Love, Mystical Union, and Ethics in Sufism," Michael Sells investigates R.C. Zaehner's characterization, in *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, of the Sufi mystic Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (also known as Bayezid). Sells examines Zaehner's argument that Bayezid converted to the Advaitic monism of Śaṅkara, critiquing Zaehner's claim that Bayezid's conversion to monism led to ego-inflation and contempt for ethical norms and contributed to the degradation of Islamic mysticism. Through a detailed reading of the most controversial texts of Bayezid, Sells show how Zaehner misunderstood and misrepresented the texts and obscured evidence that contradicted his misreadings. He then uses the Bayezid texts both to reconsider the role of love in Sufism (an element Zaehner claimed was borrowed from Christianity), and to probe into the relationship between mystical union and transgression in Islam. He also notes how the Bisṭāmī sayings interacted with neighboring mystical traditions, including Vedānta, Buddhism, and Jewish Merkevah mysticism. Sells concludes his chapter with a series of wide-ranging reflections on the place of ethics in mysticism, as well as some cautionary comments on the importance of a recognition of the complexities inherent in any scholarly attempt to assess the ethical value of any tradition's mystical beliefs and practices.

In chapter 6, "Seeing Inside and Outside the Goddess: The Mystical and the Ethical in the Teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda," Jeffrey Kripal focuses on the tension between mysticism and ethics found in the teachings and practices of the famous turn-of-the-century Bengali mystic, Ramakrishna

Paramahamsa, and his equally famous disciple Swami Vivekananda. In many ways, the chapter is a test case for exploring Paul Hacker's thesis that Vedantic monism is fundamentally incompatible with the attempt made by modern Hindu mystics to ground a "love thy neighbor" ethic in monistic consciousness. Kripal also explicates Hacker's second thesis, which states that Swami Vivekananda appropriated his monistically grounded ethical stance, not from traditional Indic texts, but from Western scholars and philosophers. Kripal points out that Swami Vivekananda's ethical and social activism is, at best, in tension with the mystically inspired ethical and social indifference of his guru, Ramakrishna, noting that Ramakrishna consistently downplayed the value of social reform in favor of mystical ecstasy. Kripal also emphasizes, however, the paradoxical nature of the interaction between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, noting that both positions have value, simultaneously, even if their different outlooks are not easily reconcilable.

In chapter 7, "The Lack of Ethics and the Ethics of Lack in Buddhism," David Loy points out that a subtle, yet significant, tension simmers beneath the seemingly straightforward connection between mysticism and ethics found in Buddhism. Historically, while earlier forms of Buddhism equated enlightenment with ethical purity (e.g., an *arhat* is defined as someone who cannot violate the precepts), later schools of Buddhism began to stress that enlightenment might well lead the bodhisattva to actions that are socially condemned, even if his or her actions were understood to always flow out of a wellspring of compassion and wisdom, and were seen to serve the greater good of sentient beings. Loy goes on to explore the ethical ramifications of nondual consciousness—how the potential for ethical freedom and spontaneity that emerges from a dissolution of the sense of separate self and an experiential awareness of an ongoing, dynamic interconnection with all things can be co-opted by the explicit normative standards of the ruling class and the state (e.g., in Japan, where the samurai's Zen awareness was at the service of loyalty to his lord). For Loy, the early Buddhist stress on noninjury of others is in stark contrast to the Japanese samurai warrior, who is helped by his Zen training to die, and kill, better. Yet Loy also stresses the potential ethical value of nondual consciousness, noting that it can lead to compassion and responsibility for other beings, as well as minimizing the compulsiveness that underlies many forms of unethical behavior.

In chapter 8, "The Sage in the World, the Perfected without Feelings: Mysticism and Moral Responsibility in Chinese Religion," Livia Kohn notes that, according to the worldview of classical China, the universe is a manifestation of the Tao, and as such, is inherently good and harmonious. Therefore, the spiritual master, as one who has realized this Tao, is one who effortlessly acts in accordance with this cosmic oneness, and naturally radiates this inherent goodness (a goodness that transcends conventional social morality) to others. As such, the mystic therefore is not moral, but transmoral. Kohn goes on to describe how this fundamental cluster of Chinese beliefs manifests themselves in different ways. For in-

stance, Chinese texts (particularly in Confucianism, neo-Confucianism, and philosophical Taoism) delineate the beneficial social impact of the transmoral activity of the "sage in the world"; other texts note the egoless, cosmically attuned, socially aloof, natural way of living of the "perfected one" (so prominent in medieval Taoism) that inspires others to find perfection; and finally, still other texts describe the magical, healing, joyous, whimsical activity of the utterly free "immortals" (the central mystical figure of religious Taoism). Kohn does not shy away from indicating some potential ethical problems inherent in these three mystical ideals, but she also notes how these issues are, at least implicitly, addressed within the Chinese tradition itself.

The third section of *Crossing Boundaries* contains chapters that are theoretical in nature. These essays, while not divorced from the "embodied" specificity of the historical and cultural studies (in the same way that chapters in the second section will inevitably contain at least tacit philosophical implications), pursue cross-cultural comparisons, construct well-argued and stimulating positions on a range of controversies germane to the area of mysticism and ethics, examine the philosophical perspective of important philosophical thinkers, and critique several seminal scholars whose thought (and behavior) is crucial to this field of inquiry.

Chapter 9, "Vital Intuitions: Henri Bergson and Mystical Ethics," begins the more explicitly theoretical reflections of this section with my examination of the work of the turn-of-the-century French philosopher Henri Bergson. Perhaps most famous for *Creative Evolution*, a strikingly original neovitalistic work that posits a cosmic life force as the impetus propelling evolution forward, Bergson also wrote insightful texts on the nature of time, consciousness, and free will (*Time and Free Will*), the relationship between mind and body (*Matter and Memory*), and the dynamic interplay between mysticism and ethics (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*). In this chapter, I critically examine the major tenets of Bergson's thought, giving special attention to aspects of his work that, I claim, provide fertile philosophical soil for a creative re-envisioning of what I term "mystical ethics." For example, I explore Bergson's emphasis on fluidity and moral freedom, his notion of intuition as an inner alignment with the ceaseless movement of life, and his passionate advocacy of mystics as ethical exemplars. While I critique certain areas of Bergson's thought, such as his privileging of Christian mysticism and concurrent blindness to the mystical depths of tribal peoples and certain other non-Christian traditions, I also underscore the significant contributions made to philosophical discourse by this often ignored and overlooked thinker.

In chapter 10, "Ethics and the Experience of Happiness," Jonathan Shear contrasts two major philosophical strategies in ethics: the development of individual character and the articulation of principles and criteria by which good and bad actions can be distinguished. Shear notes that the character-oriented approach

to ethics itself can be divided into two contrasting stances: an "external" orientation that focuses on outer behavior and an "internal" orientation that emphasizes the ethical ramification of a disciplined cultivation of expanded states of consciousness. Shear's discussion is primarily focused on the latter "state-of-being" approach to ethics, emphasizing in particular two centrally important modes of mystical experience: "pure consciousness" (a state of awareness that lacks internal content—i.e., an "emptiness" or "void") and "pure positive affect" (a state of pure bliss, joy, and inner fulfillment). Shear argues that these two types of mystical experience are not culture specific, but instead are virtually identical in every major mystical tradition. Shear's investigation of the qualities of "pure positive affect" becomes the basis for his subsequent delineation of some problems Western ethics often has in defining the parameters of "happiness." For Shear, the "pure positive affect" found in mystical experience is not only an example of happiness that is not linked to external possessions or status, but it is also immediately experienced as a supreme value in and of itself. According to Shear, as people become fulfilled internally through these experiences, they, like saints and sages, find themselves less compelled to seek external fulfillment of their desires. This naturally helps them avoid actions that conflict with their ethical beliefs, and also enhances their ability to fulfill their civic and moral duties. Shear also, in a way that is similar to Loy, notes the ethical implications of the mystical state of "pure consciousness," linking it with an increase in responsiveness to, and compassion for, others. For Shear, the character-oriented approach to ethics, especially its "state-of-being" subset, compliments the more formal criterial ethical systems and can serve to promote, not only the development of compassion and courage in individuals, but also an increased enjoyment of life.

In chapter 11, "Amoral Trickster or Mystic-Saint? Spiritual Teachers and the Transmoral Narrative," Michael Stoeber contrasts two types of overarching ethical narratives: one posits, as an ideal, a mystical realization of identity with an utterly *amoral* ultimate reality, and the second stresses the supreme value of a mystical realization of oneness with a *transmoral* ultimate reality. Stoeber points out the problems of the former position, noting that if a mystical tradition (such as Advaita Vedānta) postulates a Real which is essentially amoral, then it is difficult to understand why liberated beings within that tradition would necessarily act morally. To illustrate these problems, Stoeber comments on the ethical ramifications of the behavior of several modern spiritual teachers—focusing in particular on one contemporary guru figure: Adi Da. Drawing upon previous work by Georg Feuerstein, Stoeber outlines various rationalizations for the shocking behavior of those spiritual teachers who Stoeber calls "amoral tricksters," pointing out not only some of the dangers and philosophical problems that accompany such rationalizations, but also the difficulties inherent in making accurate ethical assessments of the behavior of those who claim to be spiritual adepts. Stoeber goes on to claim that those spiritual adepts who act out of positive con-

cern for their disciples are typically transmoral, rather than amoral, in their ethical stance in that they postulate a transmoral Real that influences one's moral life in a positive direction. He notes that while they may act in a way that transcends conventional moral guidelines, these spiritual teachers do not claim, even within their own narrative understanding, that they have license to do absolutely anything (e.g., murder children). For Stoeber, the activity of these transmoral "mystic-saints," driven as it is by an underlying concern for the welfare of others, is most adequately justified vis-à-vis a narrative in which transcendent reality is understood to be not simply nondual, but also, in some fashion, good. Such a transmoral narrative involves a creative fusion of theism and monism, and is articulated by figures such as Aurobindo Ghose, Ramanuja, Jacob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, and Jan Van Ruysbroek.

In chapter 12, "A Dance of Masks: The Esoteric Ethics of Frithjof Schuon," Hugh Urban offers a detailed, and eye-opening, account of the beliefs and practices of a spiritual community that revolved around Frithjof Schuon, a scholar of comparative religion and an advocate of the "perennial philosophy." Schuon began a religious community in Bloomington, Indiana, as a traditional Sufi order, but the community transformed over time into an eclectic synthesis of apocalyptically tinged religious practices, centering around a ritual dance. In this dance, Schuon would sit naked in the center of a circle of thirty dancing naked female disciples, then move to the periphery of the circle to embrace each of the women, and finally, return to the center of the circle. Urban not only analyzes the symbolism of this ritual and its purported links with the Sun Dance of the Sioux, but also discusses how Schuon legitimized this unorthodox ritual behavior by distinguishing between the exoteric, conventional level of ordinary understanding and morality, and the esoteric, transmoral level of knowledge and action granted to those who have been initiated into a higher Truth. Urban delves into Schuon's metaphysical doctrines (which have been praised by a number of respected academic scholars of religion), and then examines Schuon's personal life and religious community, with an emphasis on his ritual dance and its sociopolitical implications. Urban concludes the chapter with an intriguing discussion on the role of secrecy, esotericism, and ethics, commenting as well on the ethical implications of the scholarly study of religion itself.

In chapter 13, "Of Ethics and Mysticism: Concluding Reflections," Purushottama Bilimoria responds to the previous chapters, drawing upon his own training as a comparative ethicist both to present an overview of some significant moments within the historical development of Western and Eastern ethical thinking and to locate some of the discrepancies and possibilities that show themselves within the gaps and spaces of ethical and mystical discourses. Bilimoria asks us to consider the essentially modernist structure and tone of the discussion within this text, noting the ways in which its basic categories and assumptions are infused with the Enlightenment values of reason, universalism, and concern for

the individual. Without denying his own very real and very contemporary ethical concerns (especially those involving "natural and human rights" issues, which are themselves drawn from classical views on natural law and brought into sharper focus by modern rational-humanist critiques), Bilimoria prompts us to think again, from both a premodern and a postmodern perspective. The result is an "open ending" in which the mystical traditions can speak to us again today, not as infallible sources of revelation and truth, but as powerful ethical resources of transcendence, deconstruction, and radical criticism.

Finally, in the Afterword, Kripal closes *Crossing Boundaries* with an eloquent, passionate reflection on the frequently problematic, conflictual relationship between scholars of mysticism and the mystical traditions whose esoteric secrets they seek to uncover, noting the numerous ways in which such scholarship is itself a type of transgressive, yet deeply ethical, action, a type of activity that, at times at least, mirrors the deconstructive, apophatic negations that are so prominent in the words and actions of the mystics themselves.

Both Kripal and I recognized from the start that no one contributor would be able to deal, in any depth, with the full range of the issues that arise with any detailed study of the relationship between mysticism and ethics. Nonetheless, we were gratified to discover how, as *Crossing Boundaries* took form as a complex whole, it was able to provide a forum for a wide variety of fascinating reflections on the numerous questions that arise with any tough-minded investigation of the interplay between mysticism and ethics. We were also delighted, as editors, to see how all of the authors, in their own unique fashion, were willing to cross beyond their own boundaries: to look beneath the surface, to go beyond the obvious, to dare to take an unpopular stand, to create controversy, to raise problems. This text is not intended to lead the reader to philosophical closure; instead, our hope is that *Crossing Boundaries* generates lively, passionate, well-argued debate and that it stimulates further thinking within the academy. This is not a "safe" text—open it prepared to be provoked, disturbed, and intrigued.

PART ONE

Mapping the Debate

CHAPTER ONE

Debating the Mystical as the Ethical: An Indological Map

by Jeffrey J. Kripal

> *If God is One, what is bad?*—Charles Manson, quoted by R.C. Zaehner
>
> *[E]thical values arise out of mystical experience, and this experience itself has its source in the One or Universal Self which is the foundation of the world.*—W.T. Stace
>
> *The fact is we have come to use the words "holy," "sacred"* (heilig) *in an entirely derivative sense, quite different from that which they originally bore. We generally take "holy" as meaning "completely good." . . . But this common usage of the term is inaccurate. It is true that all this moral significance is contained in the word "holy," but it includes in addition—as even as we cannot but feel—a clear overplus of meaning, and this it is now our task to isolate. Nor is this merely a later or acquired meaning; rather, "holy," or at least the equivalent words in Latin and Greek, in Semitic and other ancient languages, denoted first and foremost only this overplus: if the ethical element was present at all, at any rate it was not original and never constituted the whole meaning of the word.*
> —Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* "'Numen' and the 'Numinous'"

Introduction: Mapping the Debate

Before we can debate the relationship between the mystical and the ethical in our own terms and categories, we must have at least some idea of those who have thought deeply and written passionately about this question before us. We are not the first to wonder about boundaries crossed. Quite the contrary, we are

entering a perennial discourse that is ever new, extending as it does throughout the twentieth century and, if we are to be honest, back centuries and even millennia into the religious traditions themselves. Here we might recall, among many other examples: traditional Christian heresiology, much of which was directed against the perceived ethical excesses and transgressions of various gnostic and mystical movements (see chapter 4); medieval Christian debates about the respective benefits and virtues of the contemplative and the active lives, often symbolized by the Johannine figures of Mary and Martha; classical Indian debates about the proper place of *mokṣa* in the brahmanic stages of life[1] and historical-critical and sociological discussions of the structural tensions between this same *mokṣa* and the social order, or what Heesterman dubbed "the inner conflict of tradition";[2] the many Indic "right-handed" attempts to tame, allegorize, or simply deny the explicit antinomianism and eroticism of "left-handed" Tantra; Vaiṣṇava moral concerns about the love-trysts of Krishna with the married milkmaids (*gopīs*) so sensually and beautifully described in the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the subsequent theological debates about whether the god's proper relationship to the women was adulterous (*parakīyā*) or properly conjugal (*svakīyā*) (it is said, by the way, that the former, transgressive model won in a 1717 public debate in Bengal[3]); rabbinic debates about the place of the Song of Songs and its unabashed eroticism in the Hebrew canon and the potential dangers of its interpretations; Buddhist Mahāyāna ethical critiques of the Theravādin *arhat* and his solitary, allegedly selfish existence in the forest; Jain debates about the proper degrees of ascetic renunciation and social involvement and the subsequent split into the Digāmbara ("Sky-Clad," that is, "Naked") and Śvetāmbara ("White-Clad") sects; Sufi exegetical and doctrinal discussions about the potentially blasphemous nature of the *shaṭaḥāt* or "ecstatic utterances" of the saints (see chapter 5); and Confucian criticisms of the asocialisms of Buddhist monasticism and Daoist naturalism. The list could go on and on through century after century, culture after culture, religion after religion. Certainly the very universalism of this debate is significant, for if we can say anything bordering on the indisputable about the mystical as the ethical, it is this: that the possibility of a satisfying and lasting moral mysticism always and everywhere has been contested, debated, and seriously questioned.

But it is certainly not my intention here to write a general history of mysticism and ethics. Rather, I am after a "map" of the twentieth-century debate about the ethical status of mysticism, and this only as it has manifested itself within Indologically informed contexts. Such a focus is more than justified, as India's stunning array of mystical traditions have played an especially central role in this debate. Moreover, I will not be discussing Indian ethical systems per se and the subtle power of their central categories, those of *ṛta*, *dharma* and *karma*,[4] but rather (primarily Western) academic discussions of mystical states traditionally understood as lying "after" and "outside" and "beyond" these same categories

and the sociocosmic order they define. In some real sense, then, what follows is not about Indian ethics at all but about *the transcendence or transgression of Indian ethics* in what we have come to call, for lack of a better comparative term, "mystical experience." Finally, two definitional qualifications are in order. First, I am defining "the mystical" and "mysticism" here in primarily monistic terms, more or less excluding from my purview the vast and fascinating theistic, devotional, and mythological resources of the Indic traditions.[5] I do this primarily for historical reasons, namely, because these are precisely the terms in which the twentieth-century debate was carried out. Accordingly, if one is to discuss that history, one simply cannot avoid this monistic focus. I am quite aware, however, that this monistic definition of Hindu mysticism is itself highly problematic, constructed as it is out of an orientalist discourse deeply embedded in Western and South Asian colonial processes that was congenial to both colonial and eventually Indian nationalist interests but nevertheless does not adequately reflect the stunning heterogeneity of India's mystical traditions (if, for example, had Hindu mysticism been defined in terms of the *bhakti* traditions or the Tantra, debates surrounding its moral status would have likely turned out quite differently).[6] Still, the fact remains that this same discourse, for all its problems, played an important role in the shaping of our modern category of "Hinduism," and if we are going to speak of this tradition in the twenty-first century, we cannot escape its categories and history; we can only enter them self-reflexively with the hope that we might finally work through and out of them into a more pluralistic and dialogical future (and this I attempt to do toward the end of both this chapter and chapter 6, and in the Afterword). Second, I am defining "morality" or "ethics" in a strictly social or relational sense, that is, I am concerned with the impact that mysticism does (or, perhaps more telling, does not) have on concrete social relationships, institutions, and actions. "Morality," Richard Jones writes, "involves how we ought to deal with other persons rather than with personal development."[7] I concur. Summing up these preliminary definitions, then, my focus is on *twentieth-century Indological debates on the socioethical implications of the mystical as the monistic.*

I examine in some detail seven representative texts: Albert Schweitzer's *Indian Thought and Its Development* (1936); Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's "Mysticism and Ethics in Hindu Thought" (1939); R.C. Zaehner's *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (1957); W.T. Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy* (1960); Arthur Danto's *Mysticism and Morality* (1972); Agehananda Bharati's *The Light at the Center* (1976); and James R. Horne's *The Moral Mystic* (1983). These texts by no means exhaust the literature. I have chosen four of these seven because they are in fact in dialogue with one another and form a nice "mirrored structure": Radhakrishnan, who believed in the ethical nature of Hindu mysticism, was explicitly responding to Schweitzer, who did not, and Bharati, who passionately rejected the ethical nature of mysticism, was responding in part to the earlier work of Stace, who

accepted it. Rhetorically speaking, the monographs of Zaehner, Danto, and Horne stand somewhat outside this explicit debate, but they are nevertheless important for the clear and sustained stances that they take on the issues at hand. In any case, a discussion of these seven books can function nicely to set the terms of the debate and introduce at least some of the major personalities who have taken part in it.

Lest, however, I neglect the last decades of the century and leave the false impression that nothing of value has been written on the subject recently (nothing could be further from the truth), I also bring the debate up to the present with a brief discussion of some of the more recent texts on the subject and the radically new directions they promise to take this ancient debate. Finally, I conclude this introductory essay with my own four-point position on the relationship between the mystical and the ethical, to which Professor Barnard responds in chapter 2.

Colonial Background: East and West

No discussion of the twentieth-century debate about the ethical status of mysticism—a discussion in which, by all accounts, India has played and continues to play a major role—can proceed without at least some mention of the colonial context of the early debates about Indian mysticism and the orientalist structure that these discourses set up in the minds of the participants (us included). Put too simply but not inaccurately, colonial discourse, catalyzed by German romantic, American transcendentalist, and theosophical thought, quickly learned to dichotomize and essentialize "the East" and "the West," and this for a variety of religious, economic, and political reasons. Whereas the colonizer came from "the West," the colonized belonged to "the East." The West was masculine and monotheistic—it worshipped a single male God as King, Lord, and Judge. The East, on the other hand, was effeminate and polytheistic—it worshipped a plethora of deities, among them a number of goddesses. The West, moreover, was scientific, ethical, and rational. The East was irrational, dreamy, mystical, and superstitious. Whereas the West was mature, the East was said to be childlike and innocent. Whereas the West was truly religious, the East was falsely or incompletely religious. And so on and so on. In each case, two polar extremes were posited, the West was assigned the superior one, and India was assigned the inferior one.

Such an essentializing discourse worked its ideological magic through this same series of radical stereotypes. Among its many uses was the immense power it held for justifying Europe's (and especially England's) political, cultural, and religious advances into India. These were not the ruthless, greedy, and arrogant advances of one culture into another. Rather, the masculine West, like a good Victorian husband, had taken control of the feminine East. The rational West, moreover, had brought much-needed science and technology to the irrational East. And finally, the civilized West had brought true civilization to the idolatrous and uncivilized East.

Not surprisingly, this was not quite how many Indians perceived the situation. It is one thing, after all, to be politically, spiritually, and economically colonized; it is quite another to like it. The response of Swami Vivekananda (d. 1902), whom we meet repeatedly below, would become especially influential. Vivekananda, and other thinkers like him, took these constructed polarities, accepted some, rejected others, and transposed still others. Vivekananda, for example, admitted with the colonizers that the West was indeed superior in terms of scientific thought and technology. This was hard to argue in the face of a new railroad system, steam ships, telegraph wires strung all over the country, and the impressive military technology of the English empire—guns were guns. But that, the Swami insisted, was about as far as it goes, or should go. The other polar oppositions he either challenged, sought to change, or completely reversed.

His handling of the religious polarity would become especially significant for the discussion at hand. Here the Swami admitted that India and her history may indeed possess (like all religious traditions) superstitious elements, but at her Vedāntic core, in her teachings about *brahman*, India was supreme in the spiritual world. There was no higher teaching than this. India, not the West, was the true *guru* of the world. The Swami summed up his position on the mutual superiority and inferiority of the West in these words: "When the Oriental wants to learn about machine-making, he should sit at the feet of the Occidental and learn from him. When the Occident wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul, about the meaning and mystery of this universe, he must sit at the feet of the Orient to learn."[8] It was a brilliant, if deeply ambiguous, move, for it could explain why the British had overrun India—they had better stuff—and at the same time retain a sense of cultural and religious self-esteem, even superiority, all the while reinforcing, reifying, and even sacralizing the dichotomous cultural stereotypes that Western thinkers had created before him. If such categories were not "true" or reflective of something real in Indian culture before Vivekananda, they certainly were after him. However we may want to evaluate this orientalist legacy—and most of contemporary postcolonial scholarship wishes to reject it—one thing is umistakably clear: no discussion of contemporary India or Hinduism, and especially of Hindu mysticism (another Western category), can proceed without struggling, in some fashion, with the terms Vivekananda helped to crystallize 100 years ago.[9]

But such an orientalist structure—with India as the *mysticorum locus classicus*—was always much more than a colonial or anticolonial strategem, for it also seemed to capture something important about the deep structures of the world's religious traditions. This, at least, was how the German historian of religions Friedrich Heiler saw things as he developed a related dichotomy into a general hermeneutic in his classic study, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (1932). Drawing on the earlier distinction of his distinguished Scandinavian mentor, the Lutheran bishop and scholar Nathan Soderblöm, who had

written of "personality-denying" and "personality-asserting" mysticisms and of an "acosmic religion of redemption" versus a "prophetic religion," Heiler helped set the terms for what would become a classic polarity in twentieth-century scholarship: that between "mysticism" and "prophetic religion."[10] Defining mysticism as "that form of intercourse with God in which the world and self are absolutely denied, in which human personality is dissolved, disappears and is absorbed in the infinite unity of the Godhead" (136), Heiler associated the category with a whole string of characteristics, many of which are still salient, if rightly contested, features of academic discourse today: "pure" or "logical" mysticism is sober, cold, and monotonous (136); it occurs during periods of social decay (137); it is impersonal, always seeking out a "non-emotional solitariness, stillness, and unity of the soul" (139), even a "cataleptic rigidity and complete anaesthesia" (140); it is a "denial born of weariness of life" (142); it is "passive, quietist, resigned" (142); it emphasizes reflective thought, metaphysical speculation, and psychological self-analysis (145); it focuses on technique to induce mystical states (145); it is the "religion of feminine natures" (146); its God is "the metaphysical projection of the experience of ecstasy" and of psychic simplification (146); it bears no relation to the physical world, history, society, or civilized life (165); it relies on inner subjective experiences as the basis of ultimate authority (152–53); it considers sin to be something external "which does not touch the core of man's being" (155); and it tends toward a strict monism (169–70).

As for morality and mysticism, Heiler was quite clear that mysticism does not value morality in itself but only as a means toward an end (157–58). Mystical morality has only a "negative significance," that is, it serves only as an ascetic exercise on the road to ecstasy (159). "He who is sunk in ecstasy is beyond all values," and the "God of extreme mysticism possesses neither ethical nor aesthetic predicates" (147). Moreover, the mystical way is extremely individualistic and asocial (160), although it is tolerant of other religious paths (163).

Prophetic religion is very different. Indeed, it is everything that mysticism is not: its most basic experience is that of faith, trust, and confidence in life (143–44); it knows nothing of complicated methods of meditation and asceticism but is simple, unreflective, and "free from all psychologizing" (145); its idea of God "is the reflex of the dominance of the will in the experience of faith" (148); its revelation is "an objective, historical fact, a universally binding communication of the divine will," hence its emphasis on external and institutional authority (153) and its uncompromising intolerance (163); sin is a moral, not a metaphysical, problem for it (155), and the ethical life lies at the center of the prophetic life, although redemption is finally "a free act of grace" (156); unlike mysticism, prophetic religion has the power to form communities (164–65); it builds up society and civilization (165–66); and it tends toward a real and stable dualism (169–70).

It comes as no surprise that Heiler tends to associate mysticism with Asian traditions and prophetic religion with Western traditions, particularly "the Old

and New Testaments" and the "writings of the reformers" (143–44), although he is quite clear that mysticism exists in the West as well; indeed, mysticism, though clearly an import from pagan mystery religions and Neoplatonism, "has assumed its finest and most beautiful form" in Christianity (170).

Heiler's dichotomy thus effectively preserved the orientalist division of the world into a mystical "East" and an ethical "West." Such a distinction would have a *very* long run in twentieth-century discourse about mysticism, both before and after Heiler, often thankfully free of Heiler's Christian chauvinism. Before Heiler, the great German sociologist Max Weber, for example, had written of a distinction between a world-fleeing, asocial, and often antinomian mysticism (which he associated with monistic Asian traditions) and an active and ethical, world-rejecting or inner-worldly asceticism (which he associated with the monotheistic religions of the West); for Weber this was a distinction of great importance, despite the fact that it was also admittedly a fluid one.[11] After Heiler, Rudolf Otto's ground-breaking comparative study of Śaṅkara and Eckhart, *Mysticism East and West*, advanced a similar distinction with his "the two ways" of the "mysticism of introspection" and the "mysticism of unifying vision."[12] Reinhold Niebuhr later wrote of two types of mysticism, the "mystical, predominantly oriental" and the "rational, predominantly western, classical,"[13] and Paul Tillich distinguished between the "vertical" and the "horizontal" dimensions of religious life, identifying the former with mysticism.[14] Ninian Smart's well-known and oft-quoted distinctions between the "numinous" (which he associated with the prophet) and the "mystical" (which he associated with the mystic or yogin) are also worth noting.[15] Teilhard de Chardin's "road of the east" and "road of the west" preserve a very similar understanding,[16] as does, in a very different, more academic key, Peter Berger's edited volume on the polar typology of "confrontation" and "interiority" in world religions.[17] And such a list, no doubt, could be extended for a very, very long time. We are clearly looking at something of a consensus here.

Now it would be tempting to read all of this, as postcolonial theory would, as a dubious social construction foisted on Asian cultures to further the colonial enterprise. But such a move, though certainly provocative and not without its own important truths,[18] only begs the question whether Heiler and any number of Western and Indian thinkers before and after him were not, after all is said and done, perceiving something of a "real" or genuine difference in these religious cultures. After all, it is much too easy and takes little courage to see how this or that category may have originated in a colonial context or even been used for colonial purposes (that seems obvious enough). It is much more difficult, however, to explore the possible indigenous dynamics—psychological, sociological, mythological—of these alleged cultural patterns. To take just one example, there are good psychological, sociological, and mythological grounds, rooted in indigenous child-rearing practices and Indian socialization and amply explored in a sophisticated body of theory developed by both Indian and Western thinkers, for

supposing that the modal Indian male psyche is indeed more balanced or fluid in terms of masculinity and femininity than its Western counterpart;[19] Ashis Nandy, for example, has written of India's traditional "androgynous cosmology and style," which it invoked, in the person of Gandhi, against "the hyper-masculine world view of colonialism."[20] It remains to be seen whether scholars can now move beyond both the gross polemics of the colonial period (which attacked the Indian male for being too feminine) and the more subtle accusations of our present postcolonial period (which wants to demonize the scholar for respectfully noticing similar gender patterns) and venture into a more dialogical, open, and honest future (in which the feminine or the androgynous will no doubt play an important *and eminently positive* cross-cultural role). Only then can we arrive at what Nandy has called, with respect to George Orwell, that "relative sense of freedom and critical morality which were the true antitheses of colonialism and which one could acquire only by working through the colonial consciousness."[21]

Albert Schweitzer: Indian Thought and Its Development (1936)

Very much indebted to this same orientalist structure was the early work of Albert Schweitzer. Accustomed as we are today to an academic context in which hyperspecialization and disciplinary Balkanization routinely require of one a Ph.D. to write a single sentence about another culture (and even then to worry), it is perhaps difficult for us to appreciate the enigmatic talents of an Albert Schweitzer—medical doctor, Cambridge philosopher, accomplished musician, famous missionary, and self-confessed mystic.[22] But what other twentieth-century scholar can boast of having written a book on the historical Jesus that, *still* in print, *still* being read and discussed, is one of the few undisputed classics of modern biblical studies,[23] seven other books on Bach, Goethe, the mysticism of Paul, the New Testament, and the philosophy of civilization, a two-part autobiography, and yet another volume on the mystical traditions of India that was sufficiently sophisticated and wise for its time to demand the studied attention and lengthy response of one of India's most esteemed intellectuals? Schweitzer's accomplishments become even more impressive when we learn, as noted below, that his nonspecialized critique of Indian mysticism would be repeatedly reflected in later historical and specialized research.

Schweitzer begins his book by acknowledging the influence two Hindu saints and two German intellectuals had on his intellectual-religious development: Ramakrishna and Vivekananda—whose lives Schweitzer had encountered through what he describes as the "very inspiring" French biographies of Romain Rolland—and Arthur Schopenhauer and Paul Deussen.[24] After acknowledging such influences, Schweitzer immediately sets out the "two great problems" that concern him: "the problem of world and life affirmation and world and life negation" and "the problem of ethics and the relations between ethics and these two forms of man's spiritual attitude to Being" (vii). Acknowledging that his position might

"give offence to Indian readers," Schweitzer is nevertheless clear that for him "world and life negation in itself is void of ethics" (viii). By this he does not mean that ascetic/mystical traditions have no ethical norms or any defining set of values, but rather that they must, by the logic of their world rejection, confine themselves to "a non-active ethic" (8). "Active love" of other people, Schweitzer claims, is structurally impossible within a system of world and life negation (9). Nor can such an ethic effect any lasting positive social change in the world, for again, by the force of its own internal logic, world and life negation must renounce "all activity which aims at improvement of the conditions of life in this world" (2). This distinction is an important one, for it restricts the discussion of mystical ethics to the social and the interpersonal and denies to us any recourse to the subjective or psychological effects of mystical experience as an "ethical" outcome.

Schweitzer's argument (which is very close to my four-point position enunciated below) is essentially *structural* and *paradoxical*, for it posits a basic logical incompatibility between monistic-mystical thought and social or dualistic thought,[25] *even as it insists* on both the ontological truths of the former and the practical and human necessity of the latter. In this model, mystical experience is seen as giving genuine epistemological access to the ontic, to the Real, but because this ontic realm is experienced phenomenologically as monistic and recognizes no real difference between individual beings, knowledge of this realm can generate no adequate ethics or way of life for individuals living in the particularities of society; put differently, the reality tapped into through mystical experience is *nonhuman*. Schweitzer puts "the remarkable paradox" this way:

> It is true that mysticism is in its nature the perfected kind of world-view. But if we regard the contents, all mysticism down to the present is unsatisfying, because it denies the world and life and has no ethical content. And the reason for this is that in the history of the Universe . . . no ethical principle can be discovered. No ethics can be won from knowledge of the Universe. Nor can ethics be brought into harmony with what we know of the Universe. . . . So the remarkable paradox emerges that thinking, when it is in agreement with facts, is unable to justify the world-view of ethical world and life affirmation. (12–13)

"The great problem of thought in general," then, which subsumes the two great problems stated above, "consists in the attainment of a mysticism of ethical world and life affirmation" (18). It is this paradoxical possibility of an ethical mysticism that haunts Schweitzer throughout his (and, I would argue, now our) book.

After defining his terms and setting up his basic questions, Schweitzer then proceeds through the history of Indian mystical thought, drawing on whatever Indological scholarship was available to him and relating it to his own Germanic philosophical tradition. Acknowledging that Upaniṣadic thought contains both

world-negating and world-affirming dimensions, and that the (later) brahmanic synthesis of the four-stage system (the *varṇāśramadharma*) combines these two positions by spreading them out through a single lifetime, Schweitzer nevertheless insists that brahmanic mysticism is "supra-ethical" (43). He then makes a point that will become crucial for us below: "Easy as it would be to turn the doctrine of *Tat twam asi* in an ethical direction, they nevertheless neglect to do it" (43). It is not so much, then, that Indian mystical/monistic thought *cannot* be ethical, but that, historically speaking, *it has not been*.

After pointing out that Sāṁkhyan thought is "dualistic" but still unconcerned with (active) ethics, Schweitzer moves on to Jainism and Buddhism, two traditions that demand that he qualify his initial position on the impossibility of ethics within a mystical worldview. But not much. Schweitzer argues that the Jain ethic of *ahiṃsa* or "nonviolence" arises, not from compassion for another creature, "but from the idea of keeping undefiled from the world" (80), that is, that it is an expression of world and life negation and the classic Indic concern with purity. Moreover, such an ethics knows no bounds and so is gloriously impractical, for it denies that death is essential to life and works out of the illusion that complete nonviolence is indeed possible (84).

Buddhism is more complicated, and Schweitzer, like so many other Western intellectuals of his day, clearly admires the Buddha, even as he reads, like a good Protestant, the later Mahāyāna traditions as distortions of the original pristine teachings of the historical Buddha (here his earlier work on the historical Jesus is clearly working in the background). For Schweitzer, the Buddha is "the originator of the ethic of compassion" (102), but even this ethic of compassion is incomplete because it is advanced within a life-negating worldview: "Nowhere does the master demand that because all life is suffering man should strive . . . to bring help to every human being and to every living thing" (103); or in Christian (and rather humorous) terms, "he was no Francis of Assisi" (104).[26] As there is no question of real action, "ethics can only develop as an ethic of thoughts" (104). A true "ethical world and life negation" is thus seen to be, again, "a contradictory and non-realisable idea" (111), and so Schweitzer can praise the Upaniṣadic seers for the wisdom and acuity of their transmoral position: "How clearly did the ancient Brahmins see in this matter, when they maintained that the world and life negation is something only concerned with itself, and regarded ethics as belonging to world and life affirmation!" (118) Again, we come to the basic paradox that *the mystical-monistic vision is ontologically correct but ethically inadequate*.

Certainly later Mahāyāna developed in an ethical direction with its notions of compassion and the *bodhisattva*, but these too were ultimately "imprisoned in world and life negation" and can only take into consideration "theoretical acts which contribute towards real complete deliverance from suffering existence" (127); in short, lots of talk about feeding the hungry, but very little actual feeding. In the end, the *bodhisattva* is a romantic and imaginary hero figure, whose dra-

matic vows of altruism are a bit too theatrical and hyperbolic for Schweitzer to take seriously (129).

But there is an important difference here, for whereas the brahmanic thinkers did not develop an ethic from their monistic formula of *tat tvam asi*, the Buddhist thinkers *did* out of their philosophical notion of emptiness, which denies any real difference between the ego and the other (129). Schweitzer is quick to point out the similarity between this position and the potential mystical ethics of the Upaniṣads (130), but neither the brahmanic or later Buddhist ethics is adequate for Schweitzer, for a genuine ethics demands a real difference between egos, an awareness of a kind of irreducible individuality that Schweitzer describes as "an enigma" (131).

Here again, in the ontological relativity of all the particularities of existence and the "enigma" of the person, Schweitzer returns to the paradox of his ontological-ethical position, a position that the ancient Buddhist and Hindu thinkers knew as the "doctrine of twofold truth" (160). An ethical, relative, lower, exoteric truth exists, as does a mystical, absolute, higher, esoteric truth, *and they cannot be connected*. Schweitzer points out that a thinker such as Śaṅkara can *try* to connect them through the mechanisms of reincarnation and *karma* (allowing ethical activity as preparatory or purgative) and through the concessions he makes to *bhakti* and the worship of *brahman* "in the guise of God" (164)—a "mysticism of a second order" (ibid.) for Schweitzer—but in the end, even Śaṅkara will vigorously oppose any concessions to ethics, for all ethical activity is only an aid to a better reincarnation and cannot effect redemption. "It is," Schweitzer writes, "as if he had a presentiment of the danger which threatens Brahmanic mysticism through ethics" (165). Once again, Schweitzer *agrees with* the ancient Indian thinkers to make his own point.

Schweitzer refers to the *Bhagavad Gītā* as "the first conflict" between the traditional world and life negation of India and its always present, always developing world and life affirmation. Here, after all, action is given a genuine place. But only after it has renounced its "natural motives and its natural meaning" (191). One may act now, but only after one has renounced the fruit of action. And even this activity is an activity dictated by caste; it is not "subjective action proceeding from the impulses of the heart and self-chosen responsibilities" (188). Moreover, and more troubling, the *Gītā* presents a vision, with all action stripped of its karmic consequences, of divinely sanctioned *unethical* action. Hence Krishna enjoins Arjuna to kill. Socially speaking, it is his caste duty. Ontologically speaking, there is no slayer, no slain, and so nothing to ultimately worry about. Hence we see that a radical monistic vision can just as easily lead to an ethic of violence as it can to an ethic of compassion and love.[27]

Modern Indian thought is more hopeful for Schweitzer, and he clearly admires the likes of Ram Mohun Roy, Debendranath and Rabindranath Tagore, Keshab Sen, Swami Dayanananda, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Gandhi, and

Aurobindo. But all of these men, Schweitzer points out, are writing and working "after the West." Clearly, "they had become acquainted with, and influenced by, modern European world and life affirmation and the Christian ethic of love" (209). But Schweitzer is generous here (and historically judicious), acknowledging that this stimulus only catalyzed an indigenous process that had been developing for centuries (209). These nineteenth-century reformers, in other words, were following trajectories present in their own traditions, but these trajectories were recoverable largely because of their gaze in the mirror of Western social and ethical thought. Unfortunately, however, they gazed too glancingly, they thought too quickly, and so they underestimated the extent to which their traditional world and life negation conflicted with this relatively new "Western" ethic of action and world affirmation. They did not understand that the mirror into which they were looking was not them: "[They] stood for the furtherance of love in action without troubling about the question whether and how this ethical world and life affirmation could be united with their mysticism of world and life negation" (223). As noted in chapter 6, Paul Hacker would repeat this very same criticism thirty years later.

In a concluding section, Schweitzer turns his attention again to the structural weaknesses of both Indian orientalism (best represented by Vivekananda) and its allegedly ancient mystical ethics. Such Indian thinkers, Schweitzer tells his readers, "work with the fiction that Indian thought alone is capable of profundity and piety" (254–55). "They do not undersand that mysticism only fails to make headway in European thought because it cannot comply with the demand of ethical world and life affirmation" (255). He then takes Vivekananda to task for placing the blame on individuals instead of admitting that the fault lies with a world-denying "mode of thinking" and for his stubborn refusal to see the idea of active love as something relatively new in Indian religious thought (255). Schweitzer has exaggerated his case here, for Vivekananda clearly *did* see, and quite clearly, that much of India's social decay was a result of its best and brightest leaving the world behind, hence his desire to found a paradoxical monastic order that both renounced the world and worked well within it and *for* it. Still, these rhetorical tones of an orientalist triumphalism that sees itself as spiritually superior to Western religious thought and this ahistorical consciousness that will not admit the striking newness of its own positions—these are highly problematic for Schweitzer, as they will be for many historians after him, and in the end they must no doubt be rejected. But for what?

Schweitzer has his own answer. His book ends with the ideal of a *docta ignorantia*, a "learned ignorance" that is content to live in mystery, and a renunciation of any attempt to base worldview on mysticism, not, presumably, because such a move would be ontologically "untrue" (according to Schweitzer, it would be quite accurate) but because such a move would impoverish human social life and render any social reform structurally weak, if not impossible. In the end,

"[f]rom the attempts, so barren of results, to combine knowledge of the Universe and ethics into a single world-view, the thought of mankind must advance to a position where it derives world-view from ethics" (265). Schweitzer thus ends his book by bravely, humanely letting go of a category that was dear to him for much of his life—that of "mysticism" itself. Ethics and the human condition have thus won out over mysticism and the nonhuman truths of ontology. Paradoxically, the latter truths were more real, more "true," but the former truths were more pressing, more important, more human. Hunger and poverty and illness must be answered, not with a monistic ontology promising the ultimate unreality of such suffering, but with practical, ethical, *real* action directed at the enigmatic existence of actual, if not ultimately real, human beings. Schweitzer the mystic is left behind for Schweitzer the medical missionary.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan: "Mysticism and Ethics in Hindu Thought" (1937)

As might be expected, such a lengthy critique of Indian thought by such a prominent intellectual did not go unnoticed. It was indeed a major challenge, and it deserved a major response by a major figure. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, possessing credentials as remarkable as Schweitzer's, stepped forward. Flourishing at different periods of his life in the various roles of Oxford professor, chancellor of Benares University, Indian ambassador to the Soviet Union, vice president of the Indian Republic, president of the Indian Republic, and author of more than a dozen books, Radhakrishnan embodied and so could defend cosmopolitan Indian culture in a way that no one else could. It certainly did not take him long. Schweitzer's book appeared in 1936. On 30 of April 1937 Radhakrishnan responded to it in his Sir George Birdwood Memorial Lecture at the Royal Society of Arts in London, a lecture that soon became chapter 3, "Mysticism and Ethics in Hindu Thought," of his *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1939).

The piece is fascinating, not just for what Radhakrishnan actually says, but for the rhetorical devices he employs with such skill to say it. The essay opens with a bow to Great Britain as the "best of Europe" and India as the "ultimate East" and the traditional hope that a dialogue between these two great cultures might produce something valuable for the world community.[28] Immediately, however, just below this civil spirit of dialogue, Radhakrishnan can be seen taking early swipes at both Schweitzer and Christianity, particularly in its Catholic form. Thus research on the historical Jesus, to which Schweitzer devoted so much of his early life, is brushed aside with a single sentence as an endeavor that mistakes "a mere event in history" for the true meaning of that life (59), and Catholic obedience to the Pope's encyclical on marriage is compared to Nazi obedience to Hitler's decrees (60).

Radhakrishnan's antihistoricism also announces itself early here in his stated belief that a "spiritual" view of life "remains unaffected by the advance of science

and criticism of history" (61). Obviously uncomfortable with history as a possible locus of meaning, Radhakrishnan opts, following Vivekananda (whose thought Radhakrishnan's resembles on many points), for what he calls "spirituality," which he in turn equates with "mysticism" (61). A long series of theological definitions follow, all of which effectively remove both categories from any genuine contact with the body, society, or politics, that is, with history. Throughout all of this, Radhakrishnan is a clear perennialist who asserts "an astonishing agreement which is almost entirely independent of race, clime, or age," although this "ultimate inward similarity of the human spirit" need not result in an "absolute identity" of mystical experience (64). No doubt partly because of this perennialism, Radhakrishnan cannot accept any real difference between mystical traditions, and especially that unfortunate tendency that "has grown up of late to distinguish Eastern mysticism from that of the West" (64). Here, of course, Schweitzer appears, and Radhakrishnan now mentions him by name. After pointing out, rather effectively and quite correctly, that neither the historical Jesus nor historical Christianity are hardly paragons of world-affirmation (69–74), Radhakrishnan lists what he sees as Schweitzer's eight arguments and attempts to answer each in turn. Radhakrishnan points out that Schweitzer's arguments represent a good summary of the traditional criticisms leveled at Indian mystical thought. It is thus perhaps worthwhile for our "mapping project" to list each of the eight arguments, at least as Radhakrishnan defines them, and briefly discuss the scholar-statesman's specific responses. Ironically and inexplicably, in many of the cases Radhakrishnan's specific responses serve only to establish further the very points Schweitzer had advanced.

1. *That an emphasis on ecstasy leads to world and life negation.* Radhakrishnan is clearly uncomfortable with the topic of ecstasy, perhaps because it lets the emotions and body "back in" to the spirit, and so he is quick to pathologize or at least relativize it. Ecstasy is thus "to look upon the promised land," not to actually enter into it (79). Moreover, it is not the only way to spiritual life, and it is often a "perversion of mysticism" (79) (here again, by the way, he echoes Vivekanananda, who attacked the ecstatic states of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism as signs of an effeminate weakness[29]). This is a common rhetorical technique of Radhakrishnan: to declare any mystical phenomenon that does not fit into his ethical neo-Vedāntic vision as "one-sided" or "extremist" (109), as an "abuse" (63), or as a "perversion" (79). Even more common is his tendency to answer Schweitzer's challenge with respect to Indian thought by showing how the same problems can also be found in Christianity. At other times, he combines both these pathologizing and comparative strategies, writing, for example, that the Catholic saints Theresa and Catherine also "*suffered from* visions and ecstasies" (80; italics mine).

2. *That humanist thought and the other-worldliness of Hinduism are incompatible.* Here no doubt is the crux of the matter, and Radhakrishnan is unambiguous in his rejection of worldly humanist, social, or even religious thought that privi-

leges the social over the spiritual; the "social gospels" and world-affirming nature of contemporary Christianity are particularly bothersome to Radhakrishnan, who identifies them as "neo-pagan" (66), perhaps because of their high valuation of the physical world. All of this for Radhakrishnan denies the immortal spirit and privileges the merely relative and passing. The result, for Radhakrishnan at least, is ethical disaster. "Any ethical theory must be grounded in metaphysics," he writes, for "as we think ultimate reality to be, so we behave" (80). Perhaps, but Radhakrishnan goes further and claims that only a metaphysics like his will work, since human beings cannot be adequately moral without an other-worldly metaphysics: "Only a philosophy which affirms that they are rooted in the univeral nature of things can give depth and fervour to moral life, courage and confidence in moral difficulties" (82).[30] On this topic he could not have been further from the position of Schweitzer, who did not believe that any ethic could be derived from our knowledge of the universe.

3. *That the doctrine of* māyā *is a form of world and life negation and thus renders Hindu thought nonethical.* Here Radhakrishnan argues that Schweitzer has misunderstood or unfairly represented Śaṅkara's doctrine of *māyā* and its prominence in Indian traditions. But, significantly, his own presentation of Śaṅkara is hardly traditional. After correctly pointing out the theistic traditions of India, which do not so emphasize the category (although Schweitzer clearly recognized this as well), Radhakrishnan then turns to Śaṅkara and transforms the "illusion" of *māyā* into the "symbol" of Western thought. The result is a not-so-subtle Westernization that turns Śaṅkara's *māyā* into a more world-friendly concept: "The visible world is the symbol of a more real world. It is the reflection of a spiritual universe which gives to it its life and significance" (85). Clearly, here in the symbol we are a long way from the two classical Indian metaphors for the perceptual errors of *māyā*—the confusion of dangerous snakes with harmless coiled ropes or the glimmer of a worthless seashell for valuable silver. These are not "symbols" at all. They are perceptual mistakes.[31]

4. *That the doctrine of* līlā *is equally problematic for an ethical worldview.* This same inexplicable supporting of Schweitzer continues unabated in Radhakrishnan's discussion of the world as purposeless "play" (*līlā*), which Radhakrishnan sees as an expression of "the problem of the relation between the unchanging real and the changing world" (90). Radhakrishnan clearly has no answer here—"We can only say that it is a mystery, *māyā*" (90)—and he can only answer the sincerely offered question by making fun of the questioner: "When Augustine was asked, 'What was God doing before He made heaven and earth?' he answered, 'Preparing hell for the over-curious'" (90). This, of course, is not an answer at all (although it *is* funny). Nor are his retreat into theism and his transformation of the nondual (and sensuously loaded) "bliss" (*ānanda*) into a more personal (and Christian) "joy"[32] convincing replies to a question about the impersonal *brahman* and its relationship to the particulars of the world: "The world is created by God

out of the abundance of his joy," we are told, as if this settled the matter (93). Surely it is significant for the terms of our debate that Radhakrishnan can only answer Schweitzer's ethical critique of nondualism by invoking categories (God, creation, joy) that are explicitly dualistic, theistic, and personal.

5. *That the soteriological aim of* jñāna *is nonethical.* Radhakrishnan seems to have few problems with this observation, for he himself agrees that *jñāna* (perhaps best translated as "liberating gnosis") is "something more than ethical goodness" (94). Paradoxically, however, this nonethical *jñāna* cannot be attained without ethics. Ethics is "progress," *jñāna* is "perfection," morality is "temporal development," *jñāna* is "eternal life" (94). Fair enough, but, like the relationship between *brahman* and the world, it is not at all clear how the two are related, if at all. As if to support Schweitzer again, Radhakrishnan then uses the category of *māyā* in the same sense that he had earlier argued against, namely, as an implicit denial of the worth and dignity of life in the world. So he writes of multiplicity as a cosmic deception (94) and argues that one must cease to identify with physical, biological, and mental existence "in order to know the truth" (95). Physical well-being, economic prosperity, and loved ones fare no better: "The Upaniṣad tells us that health and wealth, husband and wife are dear to us not for their own sake but because of the spirit in them" (99). Schweitzer's reading of Indian thought as a form of world and life negation is thus, once again, persuasively and ironically confirmed.

6. *That the goal of human endeavor in Hinduism is escape.* But perhaps the clearest signs that something is amiss in Radhakrishnan's arguments is his clear pathologization of Indian ascetics and mystics who write and act and think exactly as Schweitzer said they did. Hence Indian mystics who understand—in quite orthodox fashion—birth as "an error of the soul," the actual world as "bondage," and *māyā* as something from which to escape, Radhakrishnan describes as mysticism's "fanatics" (99). "If this view is accepted," he notes, "the path of the universe becomes an aimless one," history and rebirth become "parts of a mechanism of self-deception," and "[t]he will not to live is the highest good" (100). This, of course, is *precisely* Schweitzer's argument, which Radhakrishnan seems to understand but cannot bring himself to apply to the actual historical data. Moreover—and even more telling—when he must turn to an Indian text to support his position that Indian thought is not essentially ascetic but contains an active world-affirming ethic of love, he cannot find one and must turn instead to a German philosopher and to a passage from the *Gītā* that supports not his but Schweitzer's position on the negative ethic of Indian mystical thought:

> Schweitzer forgets that the great text "That art Thou" . . . is bound up with an ethic of active service. . . . At the end of his Indian tour Dr. Paul Deussen said to a gathering at Bombay: "The Gospels quite

> correctly establish as the highest law of morality, 'Love your neighbour as yourselves.' But why should I do so since by the order of nature I feel pain and pleasure only in myself, not in my neighbour? The answer is not in the Bible . . . but it is in the Veda, in the great formula That art Thou which gives in three words the combined sum of metaphysics and morals. You shall love your neighbour as yourselves because you are your neighbour." In the words of the *Bhagavadgītā*: "He who knows himself in everything and everything in himself will not injure himself by himself." (101–2)

Unfortunately, this completely misses the point, for Schweitzer's argument was not that the Bible contains a nondual metaphysics, but that such a nondual metaphysics has not historically produced an active ethics of love in India, and that, structurally speaking, cannot. That Radhakrishnan must end with an Indian text admonishing an explicitly negative, as opposed to a positive, ethic does little to convince us otherwise.

7. *That the ideal man in Hinduism is beyond good and evil.* This same pattern of an explicit rejection of Schweitzer's thesis that nevertheless functions implicitly to support it through an invocation of Western as opposed to Indian sources continues in Radhakrishnan's explication of the Upaniṣadic (and now Nietzschean) phrase "beyond good and evil": "When the Upaniṣad says that 'sin does not cling to a wise man any more than water clings to a lotus leaf' it does not mean that the sage may sin and yet be free, but rather that any one who is free from worldly attachments is also free from all temptation to sin" (102–3). But this, of course, is Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the passage, which may or may not mean this and certainly does not actually say it; at best, such passages are ambiguous and open to conflicting interpretations, Schweitzer's included. To prove his point, Radhakrishnan does what he often does—quote a Western figure or text. This time it is Augustine who must rescue the Indian ascetic-mystic: "Whosoever is begotten of God cannot sin" (103). In terms that are more classically Indic, Radhakrishnan then argues that it is impossible for the liberated sage to do wrong, "for he is no more the agent or the enjoyer" (103). This is a bit closer to a defense, but it is a defense that supports another one of Schweitzer's criticisms, namely, that such a nonagent cannot do *good* either. Refreshingly, Radhakrishnan acknowledges that Schweitzer is right to say that ethics can only be an "aid" and never actually effect redemption (103). He then returns to the notion of "the symbol" in one of his clearest passages on the relationship between ethics and ontology:

> Not that the distinctions of good and evil are arbitrary or conventional; they are certainly reasonable and natural, and they express absolute truths of the moral order, but they are fundamentally the categories of

> this world. They are symbolic, not images or shadows. The symbolism is not artificial, accidental, or false. It tells us about the ultimate reality, but darkly, reflected as it were in the mirror of the world. (104)

Here Radhakrishnan wants it both ways, and the Western category of the symbol allows him to have it: ethical norms do not "belong to reality," yet they are "natural" and "express absolute truths"; as symbols, they both are and are not reflective of ultimate reality, for they actually reflect and even participate in that which they symbolize "darkly." But this again is not an understanding particularly indigenous to India. Quite the contrary, it is borrowed from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:12).

8. *That the ethics of inner perfection is in conflict with an active love of one's neighbor.* Radhakrishnan does not so much deny this criticism as question its ultimate value. Adopting Bishop Creighton's description of those who are "as good as gold and fit for heaven but of no earthly use," Radhakrishnan admits honestly and proudly that "Hindu ethics will plead guilty of this charge" (105). But there is no reason, he argues, to regard this self-perfection as a "species of inactivity" (105). Certainly Schweitzer would agree with Radhakrishnan here, but he would also no doubt point out that it is a kind of inactive activity that has little impact on the physical and social world. "So what?" Radhakrishnan says in so many words, as he attacks the "astonishing doctrine" that what is required of us is to "get out and do something" (107). The road of economic reform, military conquest or armed revolution—all of these for Radhakrishnan result in "a coarsening of fibre and a cheapening of life," for the human being here is "treated as part of the objective world and is not permitted to remain himself" (107), which Radhakrishnan seems to equate with a kind of contemplative introversion. But he will not follow the logic of his own thought here (which seems to take us squarely back into Schweitzer's camp) and instead insists that any view of contemplation that makes it inconsistent with moral activity is "one-sided," and that any mystic who is intent on becoming one with the divine and indifferent to human suffering is an "extremist," for the "normal mystic has a burning passion for social righteousness" (109).

Radhakrishnan's final concluding section does little to support his position and much to undermine it even further. For example, he writes that "we are preoccupied with gospels of world affirmation, to the exclusion of world negation," and he criticizes modern psychology, philosophical pragmatism, and the social gospels of religion for "leading us away from the inner life of the soul" (112). A final rhetorical flourish that puts "conventional religion" in a list with Neo-paganism, Fascism, Nazism, and Bolshevism and equates the world-affirmers with the murderers and war-mongers of late 1930 Germany, Russia, and China brings Radhakrishnan's response to Schweitzer to a troubling close.

In the end, it seems that Radhakrishnan wants to tame and socialize the mystical, which inevitably tends toward the transgressive, the ascetic, and the extreme. But he can only do this by a profound double act of denial and selectivity. He thus pathologizes the ascetic and the ecstatic and turns instead to the safe, seemingly bodiless realms of Advaita Vedānta. But even here he must tame and Westernize and turn what was once a term for perceptual error or trick (*māyā*) into a symbol participating intimately in that which it reflects darkly.

I have devoted so much time and space to Schweitzer's long book and Radhakrishnan's impassioned response to it because these two texts more or less defined the basic issues and set the terms of the debate that followed for the next sixty years. Remarkably, until very recently, most of the later voices in the fray fought over the very same issues and, often, over the very same passages. Such twentieth-century voices were legion, but particularly important for our mapping purposes were those of R.C. Zaehner, W.T. Stace, Arthur Danto, Agehananda Bharati, and James R. Horne, to whom I now turn.

R.C. Zaehner: Sacred Theology and Profane Psychology

R.C. Zaehner was a trained specialist in Zoroastrianism who could read Pahlavi, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, and Pali. Once hired into the distinguished Spalding Chair in Eastern Religions and Ethics that Radhakrishna had just vacated, Zaehner made it clear from the very beginning that he could accept neither Radhakrishnan's perennialism nor his generous and hopeful universalism. On the contrary, Zaehner's vision emphasized radical difference, a certain dark and critical eye on things religious, a brave, if incomplete willingness to employ psychological reductionism as a convincing hermeneutic, and an acute, decidedly Roman Catholic theology (I was told in graduate school that R.C. stood for "Roman Catholic"). Indeed, Zaehner made it something of his lifework to show exactly why monistic forms of mysticism, wherever they are found, are ethically, psychologically, and theologically inadequate. His disarming, slightly scandalous honesty, his humorous and irreverent rhetorical style, his unabashed theologizing, his clear normative vision, and his acute sense for the amoral and even immoral nature of much of mysticism all make Zaehner a fascinating and entertaining, if never quite popular, thinker to study.

"Looking, with his glasses and his academic cap, very like an owl,"[33] Zaehner began his inagural address at Oxford with a frontal attack on what he perceived to be the simplistic and theologically erroneous universalism of Spalding and Radhakrishnan, whose money and position, respectively, he had just taken and from both of whose writings he was now quoting to deny. Michael Dummett assesses the emotional and political impact of Zaehner's inagural address this way: "Probably it was in bad taste; it certainly was very witty, and it certainly also gave great offence."[34] But it was vintage Zaehner. Twenty-two years later, reflecting on

the stated aims of Spalding that the Chair might have the "aim of bringing together the world's great religions in closer understanding, harmony, and friendship," Zaehner could admit that "I am painfully conscious of the fact that I have totally failed to achieve any (or almost any) of the objectives Mr. Spalding had in mind."[35]

Not that he ever wanted to achieve such objectives, for Zaehner's "failure" was, by his own admission, primarily a function of the scholar's honesty, his insistence on the distinct integrities of the religions he studied (what we might today call their irreducible "otherness"), and what he called, not inappropriately I think, his stubborn "pedantry," by which he meant a more or less objective eye for detail and an uncompromising insistence on precision,[36] qualities that he felt were sorely lacking in the perennialist-dominated comparative study of mysticism. In the course of those twenty-two years of marvelous "failure," one book stands out in particular need of our attention, his *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (1957) (the title bespeaks the fact that understatement was not one of Zaehner's faults). His later monograph on comparative mysticism, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (1960), was essentially a development and specific application of the psychotheological hermeneutic he had advanced in *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*. His last two books, *Our Savage God* and his posthumously published *The City within the Heart,* are located squarely within this same heremeneutic, although they can also be read as testaments of a "late Zaehner" who was becoming increasingly more critical of the ethical failures and irrational absurdities of his own theistic heritage.

Mysticism Sacred and Profane is a rhetorically rich and deeply personal document in which the comparativist artfully weaves together the revelations of his own mystical experiences, the manic-depressive diagnosis of modern psychiatry, the ancient ontologies of Sāṁkhya and Advaita Vedānta, Jungian depth psychology, Catholic theology, mescalin (which he ingests in a humorous appendix), French poetry and literature, Sufi psychological theory, the Hindu theologian Rāmānuja, the astute polemics of the "sober" Sufi Junayd, Arabic and Sanskrit linguistics, a little Freud, too much Adam and Eve, the souls of Limbo, the "simple human goodness" of Ramakrishna (whom he favorably compares to Angelus Silesius),[37] Martin Buber, and speculations on the biology and psychopathology of *kuṇḍalinī yoga*. Here clearly was a mind that knew very few boundaries.

Zaehner begins his text with these words: "It should be said at the outset that this book owes its genesis to Mr. Aldous Huxley. Had *The Doors of Perception* never been published, it is extremely doubtful whether the present author would have been rash enough to enter the field of comparative mysticism. Mr. Huxley left us no choice" (xi). Huxley's beautiful Blakean book, which had documented the novelist's claim that his own mescalin-induced mystical experiences were of the same nature and order of the classical mystics of the history of religions, strikes "at the roots of all religion that makes any claim to be taken seriously,"

Zaehner argued (xiv). Why? Because "if mescalin can produce the Beatific Vision here on earth . . . the Christian emphasis on morality is not only all wrong but also a little naive" (13). Mescalin thus "presents us not only with a social problem,—for how on earth could a society composed exclusively of ecstatics possibly be run?—but also with a theological problem of great magnitude" (13). From the beginning, from the very first pages, Zaehner understood the mystical as a serious ethical problem and a profound theological challenge. He was no doubt correct on both counts.

Zaehner is clearly struggling with his own demons here, for he himself had known the profundity and overwhelming reality of the mystical at the age of twenty shortly after reading Rimbaud's poem *Saison en Enfer*. This experience "combined all the principal traits described in *The Doors of Perception*" (xiv–xv), Zaehner tells us, although, very much unlike Huxley's, it came unsought and without the use of drugs. It was what Zaehner liked to call a "natural mystical experience," which "may occur to anyone, whatever his religious faith or lack of it, and whatever moral, immoral, or amoral life he may be leading at the time" (xv). As Zaehner would never tire of saying, this type of mysticism has nothing to do with ethics, or God, or religion for that matter.

But after his conversion to Catholicism in 1946, Zaehner had to set this earlier event beside "an experience of what I can only assure Mr. Huxley is of another order,—the attempt, however bungling and inept, to make contact with God through what Catholics call the normal channels of grace" (xv). Clearly, Huxley's book had made a potential mockery of this entire tradition, for if he were correct, "then it follows that the vision of God is a natural concomitant of mania, that it can be induced by drugs, and that since the vision makes nonsense of common morality, let alone of the virtues of humility and charity, then the picture of God which we derive from the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth must be false" (124). And so a very Catholic Zaehner, catalyzed by the social, ethical, and theological problems Huxley had made all too clear, proceeds from the depths of his own confessed mystical experiences,[38] both "sacred" and "profane," to construct a sophisticated model of mysticism that could rescue his Catholicism from the shipwreck Huxley's little book had unquestionably exposed it to.

Zaehner's model was a developmental one that was tripartite in structure and psychotheological in approach, that is, it combined both psychological and theological models to explain different types of mystical experience that constituted different stages along a normatively constructed "path" or developmental trajectory (in this, it replicates numerous traditional typologies of mystical experience constructed by the various traditions themselves). Accordingly, there are three distinct stages of the mystical path for Zaehner, each of which corresponds to a different type of mystical experience and a different psychotheological level.

The Panenhenic Experience

The first stage is that of the panenhenic[39] mystical experience in which the mystic experiences himself or herself as identical to the natural world in a manic-like state of positive ego-inflation. Such states can come naturally, as Zaehner's came to him after reading Rimbaud, or by the use of drugs, as Huxley's came to him under the influence of mescalin. Ethically speaking, such "natural" or "profane" monistic states work against any human relations (8–9) and are inherently amoral, as are both the collective unconsciousness (whose surges into consciousness define these states) and Nature itself. Not surprisingly, these states are often associated with immoral behaviors, particularly those involving libidinal powers, which are so often loosened by the ego's absorption in the unconscious (148). Neither morality nor human relationships have any relevance here (13). But things can get much worse than simple indifference, and Zaehner later turned to the mysticism of Charles Manson to demonstrate just how gruesome and disturbing such monistic states of enlightenment could become.[40]

Zaehner does not hesitate to employ a psychological reductionism to explain these natural forms of "downward transcendence" (140). For example, he often points out their striking analogies with manic-depressive illness (88, 106), a disturbing but nevertheless provocative and potentially fruitful diagnosis that deserves, I think, a very serious look, especially after the work of Kay Reed Jamison, who has convincingly demonstrated the illness's organic connection to literary and poetic genius.[41] Zaehner's tactic here is especially insightful and sophisticated, as he does not practice a simple layman's psychologism but rather turns to the mystical texts themselves and shows, convincingly I think, that the classical Sufi distinction between *basṭ* and *qabḍ*, "contraction" and "expansion," impressively replicates the depressive and manic states of the modern diagnosis, and that at least some Sufis were quite aware and critical of the manic's error of identifying his "expansion" as an ontological identification with God. In numerous other places, Zaehner employs a Jungian model and reads these states, when uncontrolled, as an absorption of the ego into the collective unconscious,[42] or, when controlled, as an integration of the conscious and the unconscious. Zaehner sums up this position in a fascinating passage in which Jung meets Jesus: "Integration, then, would seem to mean the natural mystical experience brought under the control of the intellect. At the same time the rational principle finds itself extended by its marriage with the unconscious. . . . Only when the two are functioning in harmony can we realize the Kingdom of God within us; for a house divided against itself cannot stand" (114). Such an "integration" is the psychological end point of this first stage of the mystical path.

The Isolation of the Self

Beyond these natural states of absorption in Nature and psychic integration Zaehner finds those experiences in which the soul comes to know itself as Abso-

lute beyond and outside of the phenomenal world through ascetic discipline (150). Zaehner places much of classical Indian mysticism here, and especially Advaita Vedānta, Sāṁkhya and, to a lesser extent, Mādhyamika Buddhism, all of which for him, although quite distinct in their doctrinal formulations, amount to more or less the same thing phenomenologically (that is, "so far as the experience is concerned")—the stripping of the soul of its psychophysical attachments resulting in an experience of the soul's own immortality in isolation from the world (135). Thus, for Zaehner, Sāṁkhya is superior to nature mysticism in that it clearly distinguishes the immortal soul from the natural order (125). Zaehner compares such an immortal spirit (*puruṣa*), "above both the conscious and the unconscious" (125), to the state of the amoral, newborn child: "it has reverted to original innocence in which there is neither good nor evil" (128).[43]

The Return of the Self to God

Such states are profound for Zaehner, but they are also ultimately a dead-end on the mystical path, and a dangerously seductive one at that,[44] for the soul experiencing its own inherent bliss and immortality can all too easily mistake this eternal nature with the divine itself and so deify itself as God, as *brahman*, and so on. This is "the soul's delusion that it is God,"[45] that "colossal exaltation of self"[46] that Zaehner, backed by a select group of famous Hindu and Sufi mystics, condemns as erroneous. Employing the same comparative method that he did with the manic-depressive diagnosis, in which he turned to Sufi mystical texts to find support for his own position, Zaehner does not simply issue this normative judgment from the arbitrary height of his own theological assumptions (which, by the way, he freely admits and puts on the table in his Introduction [xv]). Rather he turns (and returns in a much fuller fashion in *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*) to the Indian theistic mystic Rāmānuja (whom he clearly deeply admired) and the Sufi polemicists Qushayrī, Junayd, and ʾAṭṭār to critique the monistic excesses of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the ecstatic utterances of that most "outrageous" of Sufi mystics, Abū Yazīd: "Abū Yazīd, then, like the Yogin of the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gītā, reached a state in which he thought that 'there was no bourn beyond it,' but, according to Rāmānuja in India and Aṭṭār in Persia, *they were perfectly wrong*."[47] For "whether you call your soul an individual *puruṣa* or the Absolute *nirguṇa* or qualityless Brahman makes no difference. All you can achieve is the isolation of your essence, thereby denying yourself the presence of God" (146).[48]

How, then, might the eternal soul be delivered from its own seductively blissful isolation? Zaehner's answer is provocative. Theologically put, the answer is "grace." But that is something of an abstraction, and, phenomenologically speaking, such grace is often experienced as a form of what I have called elsewhere "the erotic," that is, a *coincidentia* of the mystical and the sexual.[49] For here the soul must realize that, if it is to proceed any further, its only role can be "that of the bride: it

must play the woman, because, as far as its relations with God are concerned, it must be entirely passive and receptive" (151). In effect, the male mystic must undergo a symbolic sex change, a gender transformation at "her" ontological core. Zaehner did not seem to be aware of what this might imply about the mystic's sexual orientation and gender identification (despite his own acknowledged homosexuality), but, to his great credit, he did not hesitate to affirm the essentially erotic nature of the very highest mystical experiences: "There is no point at all in blinking the fact that the raptures of the theistic mystic are closely akin to the transports of sexual union" (151). Despite such courage and his earlier willingness to submit natural and isolation mystical experiences to a reductive psychological hermeneutic, Zaehner will have none of the psychologist's insights here (which would seem to be more than a little relevant) and chooses instead to adopt an *imago Dei* theology that effectively reverses the psychologist's thesis that the divine experience is a projection and sublimation of the human organism (not to mention orgasm): "if man is made in the image of God, then it would be natural that God's love would be reflected in human love, and that the love of man for woman should reflect the love of God for the soul" (151). The final bliss of the theistic mystic in this life thus "consists in the total surrender of the whole personality to a God who is at the same time Love" (169). At the very heights of mystical experience, at the end of the path, the sexual, once denied by the ascetic, returns as the erotic.

Zaehner's ethical critique of mysticism runs throughout *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* and only increases in tone and conviction in his later writings. Such a critique, however, always functioned as a logical and necessary outcome of his original, tripartite, developmental stage theory that he first set out in *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*. To the question "Is mysticism moral?" Zaehner's answer is unmistakable: "It depends." It depends on what *type* of mystical experience one is discussing, and Zaehner is refreshingly clear about which types are moral and which types are not. As noted above, the first, panenhenic stage is a union with a nature that is amoral and, more often than not, decidedly antihuman. Here Zaehner quotes approvingly the honest and uncompromising humanism of the nature mystic Richard Jefferies: "How can I adequately express . . . my contempt for the assertion that all things occur for the best, for a wise and beneficent end, and are ordered by a humane intelligence! It is the most utter falsehood and a crime aginst the human race" (45). Nature "is totally indifferent to the lot of man" (45), and so to look to such natural experiences for any kind of reliable human ethics is utter folly, a project doomed to fail (and this, of coure, was Schweitzer's position).

It is not that mystical participation in such a materialist universe must be immoral or necessarily evil. Far from it: "[t]heologically it means a return to Eden, a return to the primitive condition when man had not tasted of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, a return to the innocence of childhood" (82).

Unfortunately, however, nature mysticism does not often reside in this edenic innocence, for, especially in its more manic phases, nature mysticism inevitably weakens the will, releases unconscious libidinal forces (148), and loosens the moral sense, with all too predictable social results (89, 106). This first stage, then, is at best amoral and at worst, and too often, immoral.

The moral status of Zaehner's second, isolation stage is more difficult to define, for it can be said to be both moral and amoral at the same time. True, such states require moral and ascetic discipline to reach, and in this sense they "possess" a moral dimension, at least as a prerequisite or as a preparatory stage. But in their own phenomenological structures, they are not properly moral, for, by definition, they are experiences of *isolation* and so bear no relationship to other selves, moral agents, or the world. Once again, monism, even a monism of the self, precludes a true ethics, for "in monism there can be no love" (172). More disturbingly, this same loveless monism of the self can become decidely immoral. Consider, for example, Zaehner's reading of Upaniṣadic amoralism, particularly that of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.22. Zaehner translates the passage this way:

> In this land "a father becomes no father (*a-pitā*), a mother no mother, the worlds no worlds, the gods no gods, the Vedas no Vedas. There a thief becomes no thief, the muderer of an embryo no murderer of an embryo . . . a mendicant no mendicant, an ascetic no ascetic. (The Brahman which the released soul becomes) is accompanied by neither good (*puṇyena*) nor evil. He (the soul) has passed beyond all the troubles of the heart."

Zaehner, ever the comparativist, provocatively places this scriptural passage beside the self-induced madness of Rimbaud (who said more or less the same thing) and the manic psychosis of Custance (who said more or less the same thing), only to put the sensitive reader in a very difficult interreligious situation. After setting up the phenomenological analogy, Zaehner then points out that we are dealing here with neither a mad French poet nor an even more obscure and more manic Custance but "with the sacred books of one of the world's greatest religions" (117). Zaehner does not flinch before the obvious implications of such a phenomenological comparison and suggests here, and in a far more developed way in his *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* insists, that the Upaniṣadic writers, exactly like Rimbaud and Custance, were "perfectly wrong" about both their self-deification and their alleged transcendence of morality.

Only the third, theistic stage of the mystical path is properly and genuinely moral for Zaehner, and this for both ontological and ascetic reasons. Ontologically speaking, it makes no sense to talk about ethics without some sort of duality (144), as we have already noted, and true duality appears only here in the theistic

stage. Moreover, ascetically speaking, theistic mystical experience requires moral perfection: "whereas communion with Nature is attainable without any effort and without any moral perfection, without charity and even self-denial, communion with God is impossible until sin is eradicated" (104). Thus "when all is said and done," sanctification, holiness, and ascetic practice are "the only method we have of judging between divine and 'natural' mysticism" (105). Ethics, and ethics alone, we might conclude, separates "mysticism sacred and profane." Or put differently and devotionally (not to mention erotically), *it is love*. Once again, Zaehner turns to a traditional mystic—in this case, the great Rāmānuja—to make this, perhaps his ultimate point. Siding with the great Hindu theist, Zaehner writes:

> Any mystical state which is one of undifferentiated oneness is the experience that one individual soul enjoys of its own individual self: it has nothing to do with God. Thus in any form of mystical experience from which love is absent, there can be no question of God: he is absent too. To interpret the experience as being identical with the One or the All is absurd; beguiled by the beauty and apparent infinity of its own deep nature, the liberated soul—so Rāmānuja holds—mistakes the mustard-seed for Mount Meru, the drop for the sea.[50]

Zaehner can no doubt be criticized on many fronts. His inconsistent employment of psychological reductionism is especially obvious, for it is not at all clear why theistic mystical experiences—which, according to him, are structured along engendered and sexual lines and clearly replicate universal social relationships (father, child, husband, wife, etc.)—should escape a psychological hermeneutic. Indeed, the argument can be made (and it certainly has been made by numerous mystical traditions, as well as by modern psychological traditions such as object-relations theory) that it is precisely *these* theistic experiences that are constructed out of the relative bits and pieces of mundane social life. Zaehner's theistic theology, of course, precludes such a move, and his entire method can be summed up as *a movement from profane psychology to sacred theology*. But even given this rather serious shortcoming and his own obvious (and questionable) assumptions, Zaehner, I think, has shown us convincingly that there are good reasons, reasons moreover represented by the Indian traditions themselves, not to read monistic states as ultimate and to question, radically and consistently, their troubling ethical implications. Perhaps he has given us few satisfactory answers, but he has asked for us and of us some profoundly important questions.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that "the late Zaehner," far from being the grossly unreflexive apologist that he is often painted to be, was in fact just as critical and outspoken about his own faith tradition. Consider, for example, this

late Zaehner's stinging and bitter criticism of Western religion in his two essays "The Wickedness of Evil" and "*Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*" (both published in the posthumous *The City within the Heart*). In these two articles, Zaehner expressed his concern about, among other things: the "savage" and genocidal biblical God who appears as "an irrational and sometimes brutal tyrant";[51] the "obnoxious doctrines of Incarnation and the Holy Trinity" and their specious "fulfilment" of Judaism;[52] the "repulsive" doctrine of the Atonement;[53] and the demeaning nature of religious belief ("To be religious is to be a slave, and not only to be a slave but to be the slave of monsters you have yourself thought up").[54] Here too the professor passionately argues that the monotheistic assertion of the absolute unity and supremacy of God "raises far more problems than it solves," for "if there is only one God who boasts of having created good and evil, and glories in the destruction he wreaks, then what chance has man but to bow to the will of the divine Monster?"[55] It is also good to recall Zaehner's remarks about "all that mealy-mouthed claptrap about 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild'" that denies all the hard-sayings and antifamily values of the preacher.[56] Indeed, Zaehner's barely submerged disgust with theism knows no Christian sectarianism, for there is "no Semitic religion without violent paradox," and "theology is little more than a pathetic effort of human reason fettered by irrational faith to reconcile divine inconsistencies with something that has the specious appearance of rationality."[57] Hence his concluding lines on religion in this article: "Perhaps, after all, we are better off without it."[58] Certainly this "R.C." cannot stand for an unthinking Roman Catholicism. Any future assessment of Zaehner's work, particularly in regards to his ethical stances vis-à-vis the world's religions, would do well to consider long and hard such late remarks before coming to any premature conclusions about the scholar's final conclusions.

W.T. Stace: The Return of a Moral Perennialism

One would think that Zaehner's book might have signaled a sea change in the debate about the ethical status of mysticism. And one would be wrong. The pendulum swings back toward Radhakrishnan with W.T. Stace's influential *Mysticism and Philosophy* (1960), which ends with the chapter "Mysticism, Ethics, and Religion." In it Stace sides with Radhakrishnan's position that mysticism is essentially moral, but he does not fail to acknowledge at least some of the truths of Schweitzer's position as well. The result is a mixed position leaning strongly towards Radhakrishnan. Stace organizes his chapter comments around two problems: (1) the philosophical question of the ultimate source of ethical rights and duties; and (2) the actual historical or sociological influence of mystical thought on ethical behavior.

Stace is clear enough about the first problem, and his answer could have come from the pen of Radhakrishnan: "Mystical experience . . . is that part of

human experience out of which moral feelings flow."[59] Egoism and its negative counterparts all arise out of our sense of separateness (324). The emotional counterpart of mystical experience, however, is the experience of love in which there is felt to be "no separateness of I from you, or of you from he," an experience in which the lover grasps "that we are all one in the Universal Self" (234). "[L]ove and compassion," in other words, "are feelings which are part of, or necessary and immediate accompaniments of, mystical experience" (327). Not surprisingly, Stace quotes Schopenhauer to support this position (325) and repeatedly returns to a language that seems Upaniṣadic but which is not: "ethical values arise out of mystical experience, and this experience itself has its source in the One or the Universal Self which is the foundation of the world" (326). Or again:

> The mystical theory will allege that this phenomenon [of sympathetic love] is an incipient and partial breaking down of the barriers and partitions which separate the two individual selves; and that if this breakdown were completed, it would lead to an actual identity of the "I" and the "he." Love is thus a dim groping towards that disappearance of individuality in the Universal Self which is part of the essence of mysticism. (329)

This, of course, is Radhakrishnan's position.

Stace is more humble about whether mystical experience is the only source of ethics (he seems to think that it must be for the mystical theory of ethics to work), and he admits that the difficulties in establishing such a primacy are "very great and certainly constitute a great strain on our capacity for belief" (333), but still he insists that "that part of the theory which asserts that love and compassion are actually parts of the mystical consciousness" must be accepted as true (333). Why? Because those who have had the experience say it is. Significantly, no mystic is quoted.

Unfortunately, the historical evidence is neither unambiguous nor particularly kind to Stace's theory, and Stace knows this, hence he must address the second problem, the historical or sociological problem of the actual ethical record of mystics and mystical traditions. Stace handles this problem exactly as Radhakrishnan handled it: by identifying mysticism with an ideal moral mysticism (which can only be "found" by some very selective and ingenious readings) and by declaring any tradition that falls short of this ideal "an abuse of mysticism" (339). Stace acknowledges that "it may be objected that we have defended only the ideal of mysticism," but in the end he rejects this possibility in favor of an ontologically grounded ethics and reasserts "the fact that in its essence mysticism contains the love which is the ultimate motivation of all good deeds" (340–41). Still, his final position seems more ambiguous, at least with respect to the ethical

status of Hindu mysticism: "Hindu mystics have tended to be spiritually and speculatively superior to the mystics of the West but lacking the moral fervor of the latter" (337). We are back once again to the consensus.

Arthur Danto: Countering the Counterculture

Arthur Danto's small but potent tract, *Mysticism and Morality* (1972), written in the midst of the Vietnam War and the American counter-culture "when the moral fabric of our lives appears so rent that one must look with sympathy upon anyone who in desperation turns to other civilizations for guidance,"[60] is a book that cogently critiques from an analytic philosophical position any attempt to make Oriental belief systems into something they are not—adequate moral resources for Western civilization. "No one can save us but ourselves," Danto warns his Western readers (xi).

Danto's small book ultimately ends in the same place that Schweitzer's big one does, but his means of getting there is quite different. Unlike Schweitzer, Danto believes that an inevitable relationship exists between ontology and ethics, between perceived facts[61] about the world and human action within that world. And for him one primary reason that Oriental mysticism cannot help Western moral thought is that its forms, be they Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist, all presuppose some "fantastic" or "astonishing" ontological beliefs (like *karma*, reincarnation, *mokṣa,* and *nirvāṇa*) that cannot hold up to critical scrutiny. We can appreciate these Oriental systems of thought, Danto tells us, "only if we also appreciate certain factual beliefs, antecedently held and hardly seriously questioned, regarding the world itself" (21). Unfortunately, if these factual beliefs cannot hold up to serious thought—and Danto does not think they can—then "there is very little point in Indian philosophy, and very little room for serious application of Indian moral beliefs" (21).[62]

Moreover, and even more seriously, these astonishing factual beliefs actually work against modern moral concerns, as they inevitably tend to erode the individual and relativize or diminish any efforts to reform social practices. We must never forget, Danto warns, "that it is the loss of individuality that constitutes salvation in the Indian schema" (93). In the concepts of *karma* and caste, for example, we can see "the basis for any number of bad arguments that favor invidious social distinctions," always, of course, at the great expense of individuals (30–31). With respect to Hinduism, "the Hindu is likely to feel at one with the entire universe without necessarily feeling at one with any special portion of the universe, viz., that portion consisting of other humans" (38). And "[a]s each man gets what he deserves, there seems to be no special reason to help one another" (38–39). Social reform "seems pointless" in such a world, for the world is something from which to escape, and "one is not essentially an ethical being: ethics belongs to the world in which one is momentarily lodged: it does not penetrate to the soul" (39).

Hence the search for *mokṣa* can only arise from a sense of world-weariness, with what Danto calls "cosmic boredom" (chap. 3), and in the end it is not a moral concept at all; quite the contrary, *mokṣa* "contrasts with moral concepts, and in pursuing *moksha*, we occupy a station beyond good and evil, and so beyond morality" (63). But "[e]thics has to do with how we treat one another, not merely with how we are to treat ourselves alone" (82). There is thus "something nonhuman" and certainly nonmoral in the concept of *mokṣa* (63). Particularly important is Danto's disturbing reading of the *Gītā*, a text to which he devotes an entire chapter. For Danto, in stripping action from intention and will, this sacred text "solves" the problem of *karma* and attachment but only at a tremendous moral cost:

> Not to care, I think, and this is a problem with the *Gita* as a moral tract, verges on not being quite human. There is something chilling in the image that the *Gita* creates as we approach the end. Krishna . . . and Arjuna . . . move through the battle with that half smile of the inturned face of Indian art as they slay their way dispassionately across the field of conflict, as though they were cutting their way with scythes through a field of wheat. It is not a pretty picture. It is a picture, however, of a self that has located itself beyond good and evil. (94–95)

And that, Danto points out, "is a dangerous space" (95).

"Taoism, like the Karma-Yoga of the *Gita*," Danto writes, is "a teaching that aims at the stunning of the will" (118). And this is the problem, for "it is extremely difficult to derive a moral philosophy on the basis of this if the very possibility of morality presupposes the mechanism of the will and the possibility of acting contrary to or deliberately in what one takes to be conformity with the world. Exactly that space that Taoism [and the *Gita*] intends to collapse is what makes morality possible at all" (119). For Danto, then, morality and mysticism are at best in tension and too often incompatible enterprises, for moral systems are not "natural," they do not attempt to unite the human being to the rest of the universe, nor do they flow from an experience of that mystical union, as Radhakrishnan and Stace argued. Quite the opposite, moral systems stand *against* the natural order *for* other human beings in a moral space that must demand differentiation and deny identification.[63]

Agehananda Bharati: The Irrelevance of Ethics for Mysticism

Danto's voice was probably not particularly welcome in 1972, especially among those who were eagerly embracing various gurus and Asian lifestyles. But he had an unusually gifted and sympathetic listener in the Austrian-born, Catholic apos-

tate, Hindu monk and Tāntrika turned iconoclastic anthropologist Agehananda Bharati. Bharati makes no mention of Danto's work in his *The Light at the Center* (1976), but he writes warmly of Stace.[64] I have seen Bharati's personal copy of Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy*. It is one of the most marked and annotated books in all of Bharati's library, partly because Bharati clearly appreciated Stace's philosophical sophistication and level-headedness, but also no doubt because Bharati took a position in the moral debate that could not be any further from that of Stace and his predecessor Radhakrishnan, about whom Bharati, in his usual rhetorical style, also had some rather pointed things to say.[65]

Bharati entered the fray in 1976 with his *The Light at the Center*, a book whose repeated emphasis on the phenomenologically analogous experiences of drug-induced euphoria, sexual orgasm, and mystical experience and its consistent references to "hippies" and the American guru scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s marks it off clearly as the hybrid product of the American counterculture scene and the philosophical speculations of an anthropologist-philosopher who had *and was willing to write about* his own mystical experiences (39–43), including one triggered by an all-night Tantric sex ritual in Assam and another "with a very beautiful woman" and some LSD-25 in Seattle (39–43). Few books on the study and practice of mysticism are more polemical, more entertaining, and more iconoclastic than Bharati's *The Light*.

Bharati's position on the relationship between mysticism and morality could not be much clearer (or more repeated; I counted more than forty statements on the issue in the 234-page book). "The apologists on behalf of the silent mystic majority . . . have a stake in claiming and believing that the mystic is *ipso facto* a sublime human being, a wise man, etc. This error I must dispel" (53). Bharati does his dispelling through a variety of paths, all of which can be traced back to his definitions of mysticism and the mystic, which are marked by Bharati's emphases on the aesthetic, nonontological, transgressive, and hedonistic nature of the mystical experience.

Far from being some mark of wisdom or sublime morality, mysticism for Bharati is "a skill which confers delight" (75; cf. 179), a kind of art learned through psychoexperimentation with the pleasure principle, that is, through the experiences of ecstasy and euphoria induced by any effective means. "It is irrelevant how a person came by his experience," Bharati tells us, immediately adding his own humorous (and largely autobiographical) random list: "through fasting, prayer, drugs, self-mortification, fornication, standing on his head, grace, listening to *Tristan and Isolde* unabridged three times in a row, etc." (208). Mysticism is thus "pleasurable, orgasm-linked, flesh-linked" (63), and the mystic is the one who "creates what no husband, lover, or lecher succeeds in doing: he makes orgasm permanent, uninterrupted" (200). Here a genuinely new voice enters the twentieth-century debate about Hindu mysticism and ethics: that of the Hindu Tāntrika, the erotic antinomian *par excellence*.

Bharati claims that mysticism entails no ontological implications of any sort—that is, it is of a psychological nature—and it has absolutely no effect on one's moral character. Indeed, to the extent that its methods employ the illicit and the forbidden—and the mystic is by definition a transgressor who plays with temptation (59), an embarrassment to the established order (20), a being inimical to the ecclesiastic, the establishmentarian, and the moralistic (21, 199–200), and a "marginal person" (206)—the most effective means to the mystical is often an explicitly immoral one. Mysticism, accordingly, is what is *illicit* in both its motivation and its pursuit; as such, it is an "anathema in any specific social and religious tradition" (200). Argued differently, "if observation shows that the zero-experience is triggered by meditational procedures, by drugs, by orgasm, by fasting, or by anything else, then moralistic assessments about its genesis are out of place" (112). (In such words we hear clear and resounding echoes of why Zaehner took such issue with Huxley.) Bharati's conviction, boldness, and seeming hubris are truly impressive here: "for at least two and a half thousand years, yogis, mendicants, and mystics have thought that the specific technique they used and transmitted to their disciples was necessarily bound to the style of life which they led and which they recommended. Again, they were and are wrong: any technique can and is used along with any type of religio-mystical life" (132).

Bharati will offer only two qualifications, but they are important ones: (1) adjectives such as "illicit" and "immoral," he tells us, have no meaning within a community of consenting adults who choose to participate in the mystical experiment (212–13); and (2) mystical experience *does* result in a permanent change in the psychological experience of the individual who has had one, making him or her virtually immune to "the vicissitudes of life, against boredom and despair" (75). Bharati describes this latter transformation as producing an autonomous individual who begins—and here he sounds remarkably like Foucault—"to use his body as he wishes, withdrawing it from the public reservoir of bodies" (208). In this latter sense, and in this latter sense only, mystical experience may be construed as "moral."

Still, Bharati is far more concerned to dispel any and all notions that mysticism is moral in the commonly understood sense of "socially useful" or "licit" or "good." "[T]he genuine mystic as a person," he insists in his typically humorous, jolting style, "remains the person he was before—a king, a knave, a dentist" (53). Here a sanctimonious medievalism—and by implication, all pieties—meets its funny end in the utter banality of the modern, novocaine-wielding cavity-filler. By far, the majority of mystics were of an "asocial, even anti-social, autocentric, self-indulgent kind" (87), for the mystical life "tends to effect disengagement from society" (71); indeed, "some of the best mystics were the greatest stinkers among men. Self-righteous, smug, anti-women, anti-men, politically fascist, stubborn, irrational" (91). Here it seems we have gone *way* beyond Schweitzer's position and rhetoric, both of which must now seem astonishingly gentle and comfortably compromised by comparison.

Not that Bharati ever lets up. The mystical experience, he claims, "has no merit beyond itself; assigning moral or other value to it is both logically wrong and dangerous" (74). Why? Because "it is just as possible that the mystic, following some teaching which he wrongly holds . . . is authenticated by his zero-experience, may choose an ideology that kills and tortures" (74). The prophet who has had no mystical experience is even more dangerous, for he simply "reiterates the ideal image of his society" (83). Like Danto, Bharati singles out the *Bhagavad Gītā* as a potential danger here: "In the *Bhagavadgītā*, the Lord Kṛṣṇa says that the consummate yogi cannot do things wrong; even if he kills, he doesn't, because he does not identify with the body or the mind which kills. This has given rise to ideas both naive and dangerous" (199; cf. 214–15).

It should be pointed out that Bharati's program to separate the mystical from the "inane moralizing" (229) of proselytizing swamis and prudish scholars was more than an academic argument, for Bharati was clearly interested in establishing the mystical within American society. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that "the left-handed, eroticized, well-suppressed tantric tradition is a resuscitable alternative to the ascetic, self-mortifying forms of yoga" (230), particularly in the "affluent, hedonistically liberal, increasingly dedogmatized West" (233) where there is an intellectual tradition of radical criticism and dissent. Bharati's closing lines sum up his position on the amoral status of mysticism and his call for a new approach to "the Light at the Center" that is more than a hippie-style eclecticism, more than anti-intellectual pretext. And in this call for a rational mysticism, we can no doubt see more than a little of Bharati himself:

> With the rise of intellectually disciplined non-squares, non-puritans who would absorb and transmit the primary sources unsanctimoniously, meditating, studying, *and* copulating as they do these things, there may well come a time when a rational mysticism is generated by modern people who love to think, read, learn difficult grammars, and make love to consenting adults. A rational mysticism is not a contradiction in terms; it is a mysticism whose limits are set by reason: a quest for the zero-experience without any concomitant claim to world-knowledge, special wisdom, or special morality. These latter there must be directly generated by reason, and by reason alone. (234)

So ends Bharati's book.

Much is of value in Bharati's *The Light at the Center*, particularly his reading of mysticism as essentially erotic and his radical separation of the mystical and the moral. But—appropriately, I suppose—there is also much that seems hopelessly problematic, even socially dangerous (which, of course, is consonant with his antinomian position). His calls for free love and his strange hostility to family

ties, for example, seem particularly troubling, falling as they do on an American culture that now struggles with the breakdown of the family and the epidemiological horrors of AIDS. But this, of course, is all beside the point for Bharati, since the mystical has absolutely nothing to do with the social. Tantric transgression and radical individuality are the keys to the door, certainly not the necessary sacrifices that any stable society must demand of its members.

James R. Horne: Advancing a Mixed Mysticism

The radically polarized positions of a Radhakrishnan and a Bharati find something of a resolution in the work of James Horne, a self-confessed mystic, Episcopalian priest, and scholar whose philosophical trilogy on mysticism pays consistent attention to the ethical components of the mystical.[66] Of particular importance for us here is his *The Moral Mystic* (1983), a text in which Horne employs his notions of a "pure mysticism" and a "mixed mysticism" in order to further the debate and develop what he calls "a more elaborate explanation of mysticism that may explain the mystical tendency that so easily produces a careless and even destructive amorality" (1).

After an opening chapter on what Horne describes as "increasingly . . . a consensus" (24) on the moral inadequacy of mysticism—here treated through the writings of Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Buber, Arthur Danto, and, to a lesser extent, Wayne Proudfoot—Horne turns in his second chapter to his categories of "pure" and "mixed" mysticism in order to achieve "a more precise and positive formulation of what Danto is getting at" (30). Working out of the earlier distinctions of Zaehner, who wrote of an "extrovertive" and an "introvertive" mysticism, and Huxley, who defined a "spontaneous" and an "obtained" mysticism, Horne introduces his concepts of a "mixed mysticism" (which corresponds roughly to Zaehner's "extrovertive" and Huxley's "spontaneous") and a "pure mysticism" (which corresponds roughly to Zaehner's "introvertive" and Huxley's "obtained"). This then allows him to qualify and sharpen Danto's thesis: "the amoral mysticism Danto refers to occurs not as introvertive mysticism itself, but primarily as that kind of introvertive mysticism in which there is active concentration on meditative technique with the intention of purifying consciousness" (36–37).

Horne then introduces the biologist Roland Fischer, who conceives of mystical states as states of "hyperarousal" (which can be positive, creative, manic, and rapturous *or* negative, catatonic, and anxious) and "hypoarousal" (which are distinguished by their tranquilizing effects on the mind).[67] The latter type of mysticism is especially important for Horne's discussion of morality and mysticism: "Fischer's 'hyperarousal' and 'hypoarousal' depict, even more informatively, features that have to do with amorality in mysticism. In introvertive mysticism, concentration on controlled hypoarousal to the exclusion of all other interests, so that hypoarousal becomes the final goal, rather than the means to it, could rule

out concern with moral and social questions" (38). Thus any tradition for Horne that "concentrates on and supports doctrinally a tranquilizing method, explained by deliberately self-cancelling doctrines, negative theologies, and elaboration of concepts such as emptiness" will inevitably produce mystics who will cope with their problems by "quieting down" and learn to ignore the social and ethical demands of an extroverted life (38–39).

Such are the "pure mystics," who, "[t]o put it bluntly . . . appear to be most self-centered" (5). "Society's aims and the world's progress are irrelevant to them" (6), Horne observes, for their hypoarousal techniques and goals lead them away from the external world and all its social, emotional, and political complexities: "pure mysticism and social morality are not likely to co-exist in one person, because pure mysticism's narrow focus on one goal and the technical means to achieve it cancels out interest in sympathetic consideration of the effects of our actions on others, that is, in personal and social obligations" (57). In his purest form, such a mystic is "no more moral or immoral than a technician carrying out a procedure in a laboratory more or less well" (57). The fact that pure mysticism concurs well with rational skepticism and the deconstruction of doctrinal, mythological, and social structures makes it all the more likely that such mystics will find themselves unable to enter into the always constructed, and so relative, structures of their communities and belief systems.[68]

"Mixed mystics," however, are quite different. Despite the fact that such figures have been traditionally cast as "imperfect" mystics because they never attained an absolute state of union (or hypoarousal) and seemed especially, sometimes dangerously,[69] engaged (that is, hyperaroused) with any number of social, emotional, or philosophical problems, such mystics are far from "imperfect" for Horne. Quite the contrary, they are all the richer for their active engagement with the world and their refusal to allow hypoarousal techniques to become ends in themselves. "Such mystics," Horne speculates, "were not imperfect at all, but were, instead, using introvertive meditative techniques in the attempt to resolve problems that involved other persons, objects, and, in general, their experiences of the world as a place of real and valuable multiple things" (39).

The "moral mystic" of Horne's title, then, is the "mixed mystic," the mystic who uses but does not get lost in introvertive, hypoarousal techniques, who develops his or her own idiosyncratic "proper-name morality" out of creative, problem-solving, visionary or dream experiences, and who feels "called by name" to a particular "vocation" or "destiny" in life.[70] Here Horne's theism comes out as he adopts Buber's notion of the I-Thou experience to ground mysticism in a stable moral context: "Especially for a person who has gone through an acute experience of this kind, with a visionary experience at the critical point, in the manner of a mystic, the I-Thou encounter can be a source of proper-name morality, of the belief that one has a peculiar calling, and that it is, in fact, his destiny" (68). Even here, though, Horne stresses that the mixed mystic, if he lacks what Proudfoot

calls "distance," might become immoral, for he or she might believe that God has commanded this or that action. In such a situation there is no room for reflection, doubt, or debate, no "distance" in which to be moral: "Distance has been lost, and some of the essential conditions for social morality are missing" (93).

In sum, then, Horne recognizes that "moral objections to mysticism have been based on specific interpretations of both 'mysticism' and 'morality'" (60). To the extent that scholars define mysticism as "pure mysticism" and "morality" as "social morality," Horne believes that they are correct in their negative moral assessments of mysticism (93). What Horne offers the debate—which is now, he recognizes, approaching a consensus—is a truly "moral mystic," who renounces "pure mysticism" for "mixed mysticism" and employs a "proper-name morality" alongside a "social morality," draws on the resources of tradition and religious institutions, "entertains content in the form of religious beliefs and moral rules, and grapples with them in the mystical process" of a creative decision-making (110–11). There is no end point to such a process for Horne, no final perfection in which one can say, "It is done." There is only a kind of mystical *epektasis*,[71] an ever-disappearing horizon to ponder and enter into. "No sooner do we reach a vision of God, or the Good . . . than we find that we have been thrown into moral dilemmas, in which the ideal and the demands of actual social situations clash and give rise to something like the mystical decision process again" (113). Clearly these are the conclusions of a mixed moral mystic, a being that we perhaps have always had around in our texts and our traditions but which we never quite knew how to see or evaluate or even name.

New Boundaries to Cross: Some More Recent Voices and Issues

Horne's mixed mystic certainly did not end the debate, and many fine texts followed that not only extended and developed the usual arguments about monism, transgression, moral perennialism,[72] and psychopathology but took the discourse in some very new and productive directions. I cannot possibly do justice to this literature in so short of a space, but I would like to mention four especially important developments in recent thinking that could have significant implications for the traditional debate about the mystical as the ethical in the twenty-first century: (1) anthropological discussions about the boundaries (or more often, the lack of boundaries) of the "self" and their radical cultural variation; (2) the entrance of feminist, psychoanalytic, gender, and queer theories (what we might call "the return of the body") into the discourse on mysticism, especially as these theories relate to misogyny, gender construction, social intolerance, the persecution of sexual minorities, and the possible role of trauma and sexual abuse in inducing mystical states of consciousness; (3) the consistent moral scandal of the guru in Western culture and the impact this has had on both popular perceptions and academic evaluations of Asian forms of mysticism in the West; and (4) the

increasingly relevant environmental perspective and its positive and negative "green readings" of traditional mystical texts.

The Cultural Self

One of the few things scholars of mysticism—from Radhakrishnan to Bharati (and that's quite a spectrum)—seem to agree on is that mystical states of consciousness and the practices that are said to lead up to them presuppose the transcendence of the normal, everyday sense of self. It is thus a fact of some significance that anthropological approaches to the self have attempted to show us that there is no universal "normal, everyday sense of self," that is, that different cultures construct the self—and consequently, the experienced world of the self—in radically different ways. This pluralistic position is perhaps most eloquently and provocatively modelled in the work of Richard Shweder and his notion of a "cultural psychology" that posits, quite seriously, multiple "reality posits" experienced by differently constructed cultural selves.[73] Although to my knowledge Shweder never takes his thought in precisely this direction, the implications of his cultural psychology for the study of mysticism are profound and many. Among the most important would be what we might call "the postcolonial return of the mystical culture," that is, the idea that, since some cultures construct a self with more fluid or open boundaries, and since mystical experience—for whatever else it is—is a form of self-transcendence or self-deconstruction, some cultures might "set up" their participants for mystical experience more adequately than others. This might seem like a rather obvious point, but its striking resemblance to Vivekananda's orientalism and the parallel orientalist constructions of colonialists and intellectuals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries render such a thesis, however useful and convincing, politically problematic for many, particularly those in the postcolonial and subaltern camps.

A different approach to the cultural self-world involves a more normative project of ethical and philosophical critique, religious recovery, and postmodern construction. Nicholas Gier's work is of particular relevance here. In an important philosophical study of what he calls "spiritual titanism," Gier echoes and then develops in a postmodern direction the earlier Zaehnerian critique that Indian monistic-mystical claims of self-deification are problematic and ultimately dangerous forms of ego-inflation that should not be taken on their own terms.[74] Gier, however, unlike Zaehner, does not posit a Catholic theism, complete with grace and a Beatific Vision, beyond such spiritual titanisms. His approach is more deconstructive, more dialectic, and more attuned to contemporary concerns about the environment. He thus finds his answer, not in an orthodox Teresa of Avila, a theistic Rāmānuja, or a sober Sufism, but in a uniquely mystical Nietzsche, in the nonsubstantive ontologies of Buddhism, and in the nature-friendly, ego-transcending worldview of Chinese Daoism, each of which he creatively subsumes within a triadic model of traditional meta-

physics, deconstruction, and constructive postmodernism, Gier's philosophical version of Nietzsche's Three Metamorphoses of the camel, the lion, and the child. Here Gier refers to Nietzsche scholar Graham Parkes and his interpretation of the Three Metamorphoses as representing psychic immersion, detachment, and reintegration. The camel thus comes to represent the premodern self inextricably immersed in society, the modern lion protests the oppressions of such a premodernism but can offer nothing constructive in return, and the child represents the young and hopeful vision of a constructive postmodernism. Such childlike, constructive postmoderns, Gier argues, desire to regain the premodern harmony of society and God without sacrificing the sacrality of the individual, the possibility of meaning, and the intrinsic value of the natural world. The self may be culturally constructed, multiple, and ontologically relative, as Shweder has argued, but for Gier it nevertheless matters, and matters a great deal, *which* self we opt for in this, our postmodern world in crisis. Such cultural choices, of course, are essentially ethical and inescapably normative.

The Body Returns

It is a fact of great significance, whose ethical implications we are only beginning to realize, that mystical traditions consistently require of their male practitioners that they "become women" before the male divine, even as they often subordinate, denigrate, and demean actual historical women (who would seem, at first glance, to be more physiologically fit for such an engendered mystico-erotic encounter in the first place). Symbolic and literal sex changes,[75] ascetic misogyny, sexual rituals with other human practitioners designed to induce mystical states, men given spiritual breasts through textual interpretation,[76] women given penises through magical means or—the more usual method—reincarnation,[77] the "renunciation of heterosexual carnality and the concomitant affirmation of the homosocial rapture of mystical ecstasy" expressed in terms of an erotic passion that binds together a mystical fraternity,[78] sexual abuse manifesting as divine possession,[79] a fiery angel thrusting a flame-tipped arrow into the "bowels" of a very famous (and moaning) female saint,[80] male mystics passionately "in love" with a male God, males "pierced" by the divine,[81] mystical marriages of all sorts, divine phalluses Hindu and Kabbalistic,[82] spiritual eunuchs "castrated" for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:11–12), and androgynous, not to mention hermaphroditic, states of perfection[83]—this is the usual stuff of mystical literature,[84] the "open secret" for those with the proverbial ears to hear.

It would be impossible, I think, to underestimate what this all means for the study of mysticism. Indeed, given the heightened moral tone of contemporary cultural debates about women, men, homosexuality, and the treatment of ethnic and sexual minorities everywhere, the ethical implications of such themes in the history of mysticism constitute some of the greatest challenges and resources for the future study of mysticism and ethics. It is time, I hope, to move away from

our century-long obsession with the traditionally abstract themes of a possible common core (be it epistemologically or ethically construed) and into that indubitable reality that, despite being maligned and misunderstood, has always driven and inspired and shaped the mystical in the history of religions—*the human body*. In Grace Jantzen's Foucauldian terms, it is time to deconstruct the well-worn twentieth-century philosophical constructions of mysticism and the structures of power and gender that they encode[85] so that we might begin to reconstruct the mystical and its critical study in a way that is (1) more reflective of the actual history of mysticism (*all* of which was and is embodied) and (2) more adequate to our own contemporary moral concerns, many of which (such as our environmental crisis, the ultimate body issue) border on the potentially apocalyptic.[86] In comparative religious terms, we might say that it is time to abandon our Neoplatonic assumptions about the body as dead tomb (*soma-sema*) or our Advaitic assumptions about "bodiless liberation" (*videha-mukti*) for a more incarnational or Tantric approach that sees the human body, with all its messiness (indeed precisely *in* its messiness), as the living site and source of the mystical.

The Guru's Western Fall

The last four decades of the twentieth century saw the Asian institution of the guru definitively enter Western culture with varying degrees of success. The personal transformations have no doubt been many, but so have the scandals, and the literature is all too full of discussions about the moral failures of any number of prominent guru figures: Bhagwan Rajneesh (whose community was infamous for a depressingly long list of crimes, including drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, phone tapping, food poisoning, fraud, arson, attempted murder, and extradition),[87] Swami Muktananda (who allegedly had sex with a number of women, some quite young, in the years before he died),[88] Chögyam Trungpa, and Osel Tendzin (Trungpa's successor, who knowingly infected one of his male lover-disciples with AIDS),[89] to name a few of the more well-known. Indeed, as one author has pointed out, in a single year (1983) "five of the six most esteemed Zen Buddhist masters in the United States, who presumably were selected by an enlightened teacher abroad to teach, were involved in grossly self-centered and conspicuously unenlightened behavior."[90]

Nor is the problem restricted to any one particular religious tradition. It is the culturally transported guru institution itself that seems to be at issue.[91] The problems are many, but foremost among them are the following: the absolutist nature of the guru's person and claims, which result in a kind of divine infallibility; the authoritarian, theocratic substructure of the guru-disciple relationship, which can only encounter serious problems when it runs head-on into the individualist, democratic ethos of Western societies; the often delusional and solipsistic nature of the guru's worldview, which can be imposed on others only at considerable psychic cost; a plethora of psychological issues (transference, ego

development, dependency needs, etc.) surrounding the dynamics of the disciple's surrender to the guru; and the strategies of censorship, scapegoating, and persecution to which the guru traditions often resort in order to hide their family secrets and preserve their already tarnished public images.[92]

It is important to point out that North American guru traditions differ greatly in their handling and resolution of these issues. For example, in my own correspondence with Adi Da, a prominent and prolific guru who has probably done more than any other contemporary figure to develop a Tantric spirituality that incorporates sexuality directly into its practice, I have repeatedly been impressed with the openness, honesty, and sophistication displayed by both him and his disciples in discussing and handling these sensitive sexual issues.[93] Communication and open discussion *are* possible. To take another positive case, ISKCON (more popularly know as the Hare Krishnas), in what can only be called an astonishing move, published in an in-house journal an important academic article analyzing the sociological and doctrinal conditions that resulted in a rash of child abuse cases in its own schools during a fifteen-year period.[94] The list of factors that E. Burke Rochford and Jennifer Heinlein analyze in their study of the sociological and doctrinal contexts that made child abuse not only possible but predictable in ISKCON are many. Among them we might list: the tradition's (very traditional) privileging of celibacy and its stigmatization of active sexuality as a sign of spiritual weakness; the subsequent devaluation of children and the family under the rubric of "detachment" that these doctrines logically produced (and have no doubt always produced); the inherent misogyny of the tradition's gender constructions, which identified the spiritual fulfillment of women in terms of marriage and family and so defined them as real threats to the spiritual development of men, whose constructed ideals evolved around the renunciation of these very same things; and the unquestioned trust that parents put in the hierarchical, authoritarian nature of ISKCON's institutional structure and its guru-leaders. This, I would argue, is a mystical tradition at its very best and bravest, struggling with ethical concerns openly and honestly, locating them, not apologetically in some "perversion of the norm" (as Radhakrishnan and Stace attempted) or in the fantasies of some imagined ill-intentioned journalist or scholar, but *in the central doctrines of the mystical tradition itself*.

Short of this kind of courage, the immoral guru presents us with a seemingly insoluble dilemma, at least as long as we hold onto the dubious idea that mystics must be moral. On the contrary, it seems to me that we must learn to live with the historically grounded, structural paradox that they need not be, and this for two reasons: first, because there is simply no other convincing way to explain the historical record; and second, and most pressing, because any attempt to deny such historical realities (and to write them off as "perversions," "abuses," or "exceptions" are subtle forms of denial) in order to preserve mysticism as some kind of pure moral experience creates a discourse and a set of dichotomies in which the historian of mysticism cannot adequately discuss what so obviously needs to

be discussed. (It also, I think, trivializes the pain and suffering of those human beings who have suffered at the hands of such immoral mystics.) Put differently, if we insist that the mysticism of such figures must be moral in our social sense of that term and we find (as we often do) these mystics crossing the boundaries of our moral systems, then we are left with only two options: (1) we either declare such mystics fakes (which flies in the face of overwhelming positive testimonial and textual evidence); or (2) we scapegoat authors who rightfully point out to us uncomfortable *and important* facts about them (which is reprehensible). In a dichotomizing, dualistic, and moralistic universe of discourse, there simply are no other answers. The richness and ambiguities of history are sacrificed for the simplicities of an insecure piety, and the freedom of expression and thought upon which the study of religion is based become seriously compromised. In essence, I am suggesting that the superior hermeneutic is the one that can encompass the most data, however disconcerting it might be, not the one that insists on denying, censoring, or reducing that which it cannot (in the case of the secular scholar) or does not want to (in the case of the disciple) see. If we are to be "nondual" anywhere, it should be here, in a method that refuses to separate what so often cannot be separated, that is, the mystical and the socially immoral.

It is also crucial to keep in mind, as Sells rightly reminds us in his own essay, that such excesses are widely encountered in most religious systems and are by no means unique features of the guru institution. One need only recall the scandals involving childhood sexual abuse that routinely plague Catholic and other Christian communities to realize that we are dealing here with a problem that seems to surface wherever we find the structures of power, socioreligious authority, hierarchy and patriarchy, that is, practically everywhere.

The Green Gaze

Mystical traditions are often appropriated by well-meaning individuals or movements concerned about environmental degradation and the future sustainability of life on the planet. At first glance, such traditions do indeed sometimes seem to be ecofriendly with their consistent emphasis on unity. But such perceptions are often deceptive, as has been amply illustrated by what must count as one of the most important, convincing, and relevant ethical critiques of the mystical at the end of the century—the "green gaze" of the environmental critique and its central question, "What consequence might such-and-such a doctrine have on the human handling of the physical environment?" The literature is large here and growing fast,[95] but I would like to single out the work of Lance Nelson as paradigmatic, especially for its implications for the study of Indian mystical traditions indebted in any way to the ontology of Advaita Vedānta. In a cogent essay,[96] Nelson argues that Advaita Vedānta's potential contribution to ecological awareness has been "vastly overestimated,"[97] and that, contrary to popular belief, its type of acosmic monism—with its consequent ascetic, androcentric, world-denying structures—actually functions

in practice as a kind of radical dualism that encourages "attitudes of devaluation and neglect of the natural universe,"[98] which, unsurprisingly, is seen as feminine. The world is not simply something to leave or be saved from here—it is a horrible illusion to be completely effaced from consciousness, mere dog vomit to be cast out in disgust by the discriminating knower.[99] "It is pointless, therefore, and utterly misleading," Nelson argues in what still must count as a generous understatement, "to say that Advaita overcomes the Western duality of mind and body. If anything, the Advaitin is less comfortable in his body than the Westerner."[100] And again: "It is difficult to see in such modes of thought anything less than an extreme version of the world-negating, transcendental dualism that supports environmental neglect. Advaita achieves its brand of nonduality not inclusively but exclusively, at great cost: the world of nature is finally cast out of the Absolute, out of existence."[101]

It remains to be seen how such a green gaze might see mystical traditions outside of India, but, with the possible exceptions of Tantric and Mādhyamika thought (whose nondualisms Nelson insightfully distinguishes from the Advaitic variety), South Asian goddess traditions, Daoist thought, and any number of nonliterate traditions, the nature-based spiritualities of which seem to be positioning them for possible ecological appropriation, I suspect that Nelson's critical voice will only find more and more support as time goes on. For, precisely to the extent that the mystical becomes ascetic and world-denying, it becomes ethically problematic for anyone—from Swami Vivekananda to Lance Nelson—who is deeply (and legitimately) concerned about "the world."

Personal Reflections on the Debate: A Four-Point Position

I have made only the most pathetic efforts to hide my own normative convictions and historical readings (and these must be kept separate) when discussing the twentieth-century literature on mysticism and ethics. Normatively speaking, it should come to no attentive reader's surprise that I, like most other Western theorists, do not think that mysticism, at least in its more monistic forms (anywhere, I should add), can function as an adequate resource for contemporary ethics. I must immediately note, however, that both this "monistic" qualification and this adjective "contemporary" need to be stressed, as I am not addressing myself to forms of religiosity that privilege a theistic difference and distance over a monistic identity (and I realize that these two forms often, if not always, overlap; it is a matter of accent and emphasis), nor am I questioning the possibility that monistic worldviews may have functioned quite well in premodern societies (and especially in the monastic and ascetic communities that had renounced the social as a prerequisite for reaching these ontological visions). My normative concerns rather lie exclusively with the adequacy of monistic forms of mysticism in addressing our own modern and postmodern concerns, after the Enlightenment, after colonialism, after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, after Gandhi's *satyagraha*, the

American civil rights movement, liberation theology, postcolonial theory, feminism, and queer theory. Moreover, I hope that it is equally obvious that the four new perspectives briefly outlined above (the cultural self, the return of the body, the Western fall of the guru, and the green gaze) bear more than a little resemblance to my own ethical agendas and the directions I personally would like to see the discussion go.

Such are my normative convictions. But, as Fort has reminded us in another context, "apologetic wish" and "accurate reporting" are not the same thing.[102] Or as Jones puts it, "[w]hether mystical and moral values converge is a matter for empirical study, not definition."[103] So for the sake of this volume, which I take to be primarily historical-empirical and only secondarily normative-definitional, it is important that I set out more systematically just where I stand on the mystical as the ethical as a historian of religions, that is, as someone whose first and primary concern is "to get the record straight." Let me, then, make four final points toward this goal—one paradoxical, one structural, one historical, and one psychological—after which I will conclude with some personal reflections.

1. Paradoxically speaking, I am in general agreement with Schweitzer that mystical-monistic experience gives us a unique access into the ontological dimensions of human experience, *but* that this ontological level cannot help us with our social and ethical tasks. However, I would restrict the ontological range of mystical experience to *human* being and refrain from making any grand claims about the mystic's access to cosmic or universal Being.

I would, however, make two further qualifications. First, I believe that human neurophysiology probably has as much to do with these experiences as psychology per se, and that consequently we can and *should* begin to speak much more about a biology of mysticism (again, the body returns, this time on a microcosmic level through a distinctly scientific method). Here the mystical appears as the product of complicated psychological responses that have been radicalized by extraordinary neurobiological processes (everything from extreme cerebral lateralization[104] to socially marginalized sexualities to Persinger's temporal lobe microseizures[105]) and triggered by genuine life-cycle developmental crises. Second, I would argue that, although we must insist on the intrahuman and even biological nature of mystical experience, this does not necessarily mean that such experiential patterns or structures may not actually reflect something about the objective, nonhuman universe, along the lines of a mathematical formula (which is, after all, a pure mental abstraction "in the head" that nevertheless turns out to correspond to the objective universe). Peter Berger puts it this way:

> The case of mathematics is rather instructive in this connection. Without any doubt mathematics is a projection onto reality of certain structures of human consciousness. Yet the most amazing fact about modern science is that these structures have turned out to correspond to

> something "out there" (to quote the good Bishop Robinson). Mathematicians, physical scientists, and philosophers of science are still trying hard to understand just how this is possible. . . . The parallel with the case of religion, of course, is not perfect, but it is worth reflecting on.[106]

And this insight, of course, is nothing more (and nothing less) than a sophisticated and eminently modern version of the ancient and widespread belief—so evident in alchemical, Kabbalistic, Daoist, yogic, Tantric, and gnostic thought—that the subjective and physiological microcosm of the human being corresponds in some miraculous way to the objective macrocosmic structures of the cosmos.

2. Structurally speaking, I believe that we can say that mystical thought, to the extent that it draws on monistic doctrines, inevitably exists in significant tension with any ethical system that presupposes a real agent, a real other, or a real world. Put differently, we might say that, since monism consistently displays a certain "structural instability" in terms of ethics, we can employ it as a generalizable, existential model only with great risk. Again, it may be ontologically "true," that is, reflective of the nature of humans and (perhaps) even the universe, but it is nevertheless ethically and socially dangerous (hence the common esoteric structures of the mystical traditions themselves, which respond to this danger through different strategies of occultation and elitism). Here I side definitively with Horne, who sees a "mixed mysticism," actively engaged—intellectually, morally, and emotionally—with the phenomenal world in all its messiness and ambiguity, as the more sustainable and hopeful option.

3. Historically speaking, it is important to keep in mind that the twentieth-century debate on the moral status of mysticism is a function of our modernity and the intellectual, political, social, and economic transformations that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wrought on us. As both Schweitzer and Radhakrishnan have reminded us, Christianity was hardly the bastion of social justice and the rights of the individual before the nineteenth century and all the socioeconomic transformations that industrialism, capitalism, democracy, and mass education wrought on human consciousness.[107] Radhakrishnan was thus no doubt perfectly justified to express his doubts that it was Indian religion that rendered Indian society backward and Western religion that transformed Western society into a robust and aggressive socioeconomic system.[108] Indeed, it seems more likely that it was the secular, socioeconomic, and technological transformations of the nineteenth century that gave us our modern sense of the individual as a person worthy of respect and dignity and basic human rights.

The conflict between the East and the West or between Hinduism and Christianity or between morality and mysticism, then, seems to run much deeper than such suspiciously dualistic dichotomies would suggest, spinning as it does around the conceptual axes of two basic historical forms of consciousness *that are now*

shared by Westerners and South Asians alike: a premodern worldview, which tends to submerge the individual in an emotionally secure but economically tenuous sea of rigorously defined, hierarchical community, ontological union, socioreligious authority, and peasant life, and a modern worldview, which wants to raise the individual person to the center of social life and politics through widely distributed wealth, mass education, mass information, technology, secularization, and democratic process, with real benefits and equally real cultural, emotional, and religious costs. Put differently, although the problematic moral status of mysticism has clearly been recognized throughout history and reflexively "modern" (or even "postmodern") subjectivities have existed for millennia,[109] it is only in the twentieth century with the rise of a socially prevalent modernism that mystical premodernism becomes a particularly acute problem worthy of cross-cultural critique and debate. In Gier's poetic Nietzschean terms, cultural history has moved us beyond both the psychic immersion of the premodern camel and the detached separation of the modern lion into the conscious constructions and reintegrations of the playful, postmodern child.

4. But I would go further than these paradoxical, structural, and historical points—all of which have been advanced before and more eloquently by others—and argue that the moral status of the mystical is more ambiguous and more complicated still, for Gier's allegorical mystical child often appears in its specific historical embodiment in what can only be called a dysfunctional family. After all, it is often not just the case that a particular mystical-monistic experience is itself structurally nonmoral but that the means of inducing such states of consciousness are, at least from a social perspective, positively immoral, physically dangerous, or emotionally tragic. For example, it appears unproblematic to label the simplicity, intellectual power, and elegance of Ramana Maharshi's teachings as "mystical"; their strikingly monistic, nondual character more than merits the term. But what do we do with a Charles Manson, who claims to enter a phenomenologically similar, if not identical, state but draws from it very different conclusions and acts? Moreover—to mess things up even more—what do we do with the biographical facts that the origins of Maharshi's states were linked inextricably to severe emotional trauma manifesting as a fear of death, an eating disorder, severe depression, the rejection of family members, and the renunciation of all normal relationships after the death of his beloved father and his subsequent search for "my Father in accordance with His command"?[110] And do we blink again when we find virtually identical patterns of dramatic parent-figure loss in the lives of other well-known mystics,[111] such as Ramakrishna,[112] Aurobindo,[113] and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh?[114] And then there is James Leuba's famously provocative and famously persuasive claim, "Not one of the prominent representatives of [Christian] mysticism lived a normal married life."[115] Are such traumatic events, broken sexual lives, and the subsequent states of these mystics psychologically linked?

That conclusion seems difficult to resist. Human beings, after all, do not normally unite themselves with the universe, nor do they routinely leave their bodies to become one with the Light. Consciousness is structured in such a way to protect itself and to maintain a certain equilibrium. Hence many forms of contemporary psychological theory measure mental health through such measures as the ego's ability to attach itself to objects and other people, a far cry indeed from the traditional mystical metaphors of death, detachment, illusion, and annihilation. Given the psyche's natural tendency to preserve itself, it should come as no surprise that it is usually—if by no means always—necessary to employ some sort of violent means to alter or destroy this equilibrium in order to induce a mystical state. Psychoactive drugs, sexually transgressive practice, sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, psychopathology, fasting, and ascetic violence are among the more common means in the history of religions, but psychological and physical trauma of any sort (anything from car wrecks to sexual abuse to the death of a parent) are often equally, if not far more, effective. This is *not* to say that traumatogenetic states entered through something like repeated sexual abuse or the death of a loved one are themselves immoral or even inauthentic; rather, I am simply arguing that it is often the case that certain types of altered states of consciousness are psychologically accessible only because of clearly and decisively tragic events, few of which we would want to call "moral." As I have argued elsewhere, the house of the mystical cannot be reduced to its various doors.[116] How one got in and what is inside are two very different issues.

Here, then, is my four-point position:

- Paradoxically speaking, mystical-monistic experience, despite the fact that it might give us a genuine ontological probe into human being (be it biologically or theologically conceived), inevitably exists in tension with any socially defined ethical system;
- Structurally speaking, mystical systems are socially and ethically problematic precisely to the extent that they adopt or express themselves within a monistic ontology, since all social-ethical systems require dualism and distance to work;
- Historically speaking, the mystical-monistic became especially problematic in the twentieth century after the rise of modern individualism in the nineteenth;
- Psychologically speaking, mystical states of consciousness are often induced by decidedly tragic or even immoral means that nevertheless do not render the experiences themselves immoral.

Philosophically, what I am left with in the end is a kind of paradoxical, cross-cultural "mystical humanism" that acknowledges, values, and even seeks out the

ontological ground(lessness) of human being, but that also insists on acknowledging, protecting, and nurturing the social, ethical, and physical well-being of historical individuals, even if this means forestalling, for the moment at least, those mystical truths of personal dissolution and union with the universe that, with the physical deaths of these same individuals, become undeniable and absolute. "Heaven and earth are not kind: / The ten thousand things are straw dogs to them," sings the *Tao Te Ching* in a different land. So too with the Sage: "People are straw dogs to him."[117] Hence the necessity of asserting our humanity, our capacity for "kindness," before all three.

Such a position carries clear hermeneutical benefits, as it allows the mystical to be the mystical and the social to be the social without forcing either human dimension into the structures and requirements of the other (it also, by the way, strongly resembles any number of two-tiered theories of truth that we find in the history of mysticism). In essence, it frees us for both genuine appreciation and honest criticism. With such a hermeneutics we can then examine the history of mysticism, not as a series of phenomena to judge (always according to our own social mores) as "genuinely" religious or as "perversions" from some (historically nonexistent) ideal, but as a maddeningly complicated family of psychophysical, mythical, and ritual experiments whose relationships to the different social worlds in which they have appeared can be located along a broad spectrum of cultural possibilities, from radical transgression (as we find—in very different fashions—in the subversive teachings of the historical Jesus, in the poetry of William Blake, or in left-handed Tantra[118]) to a culturally syntonic, nearly complete institutionalization (as we find in orthodox Brahmanism or denominational Christianity).

I am thus *not* arguing that mystics cannot be moral. Certainly there are countless "moral mystics" along this broad and generous spectrum, which any good history of mysticism can show, but I would argue that their morality, their social consciousness, their empowerment, or whatever one wants to call it is a product of their interaction with the social surround in which the mystics find themselves and is not something internal or "natural" to the phenomenology of the monistic-mystical experience itself. If that were the case, the history of mysticism would not be filled with antinomian traditions, esoteric strategies, transgressive rituals, and public debates (such as this book) about the relationship between the mystical and the ethical. That is, there would be no spectrum. But, for better or for worse, *there is*. So let us conclude the obvious and not project our own modern desires for a mystical moral perennialism back into history, where they can never find a stable home. Only when we renounce such desires, recognize that there is no necessary connection between the mystical and the ethical, and see that the two have taken any number of complicated stances in relationship to one other will we be able to think and debate into existence an adequate history of mysticism and ethics. Short of that, we are left with only a collection of good intentions and ahistorical fantasies suspiciously in line with our own social, ethical,

and religious understandings. Here the mystical has become comfortable and safe and public, which is to say that it has ceased to be what it is—the secret (*mustikon*) that transcends/offends.

Hence that marvelous Blakean "road of excess" that was the twentieth-century study of mysticism has led us, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to our own "palace of wisdom,"[119] built on the *Grund* of a deep respect for the ontological (whether metaphysically or apophatically conceived) but with the stone and mortar of our always relative and relational selves and in the "in-between" of cross-cultural and historical encounter, comparison, debate, and dialogue. India, no doubt, has played a major role in the building of this wisdom-palace, even if scholars, religionists, and colonialists have too quickly reduced its rich culture and history to just one side of a simplistic binary code (East/West, spiritual/materialistic, mystical/rational, monistic/theistic, feminine/masculine, etc.). Still, for many Westerners—and I would put myself here—it is an autobiographical, historical, and cultural fact that it was through India, and particularly its mystical traditions, that they encountered something radically other, something inexplicably attractive and beautiful, something genuinely divine. The orientalist "myth" of a mystical India, then, is not simply fictive, at least no more so than any other Western or Asian religious discourse; quite the contrary, it has been existentially true for countless Westerners (and far more South Asians), functioning for them as a powerful narrative within which they might know and be transformed by the events of a classical religious quest or Campbellian hero's journey: departure, adventure, pilgrimage, existential danger, sacred encounter, and return.

Was all of this drama imagined within a deeply problematic history of politics, unequal power, and the dubious reifications of language? Absolutely, but again, probably no more so than any other transformative religious paradigm. If I may reflect theologically for a moment, it is entirely possible to affirm the historical, socially constructed character of a religious symbol or myth (and be radically suspicious of the ways it has undergirded malicious social and political processes) and still entertain the genuine possibility of divinity appearing to human beings through that very veil. In Laurel Schneider's more eloquent terms: "At issue is the enduring possibility that ideas of divinity are creative in the profoundest sense, that the divine reserves for itself the possibility of responding to, becoming even, the symbols and names that human beings construct in multiple, embodied, and temporal ways. . . . More precisely, divine realities may choose to enact themselves in metaphor, to 'come forth' in substantive and worldly ways in constructions."[120]

I do not, then, wish to deny the problems of the orientalist narrative, which are indubitably legion. I simply want to point out that orientalism-as-quest often possesses a genuinely mythical dimension, and that its discourses are often emotionally positive, aesthetically beautiful, and religiously transformative, something I am afraid the Marxist-inspired, materialist, and depressingly relativistic rhetorics of postcolonial theorists seldom, if ever, are. Certainly we have to work through

this myth, as we have so many others, but in the process we need not demonize it nor reduce its multiple meanings to a single, simplistic, and entirely negative political narrative. Real beauty and genuine religious power are found here, and we miss something terribly important about modern religious history if we dismiss this modern quest for the mystical too quickly or dogmatically.

And even if we want to remain with a strictly political mode of thought, we must admit that orientalism was constructed, almost from the beginning, to work both ways and that, consequently, one result of its narrative has been a kind of spiritual colonization (if in the reverse direction of the colonized Indian) and the creation of the socio-ontological "split" examined above. Personally, I read this dual self, not just as a feature of a shared (post)colonial history, which we must try to overcome, but as a "contradiction in the human condition itself,"[121] which we cannot overcome. In other words, Indian monistic mysticism, which witnesses in an unusually clear way to the ontological ground(lessness) of the human being, and Western social theory, which witnesses in an equally clear way to the integrity and value of the modern individual, cannot be easily reconciled on the level of social practice or ethical reflection, but they can nevertheless exist side by side—even within the same person—as two different but mutually enriching human modalities. Each, moreover, speaks differently and eloquently to something ancient, perhaps even universal, in human experience: the ultimate mystery of the universe and its seeming indifference to our personal and social fates.

Such a dialectical conclusion is probably only possible in the comparative space of cross-cultural encounter, politics and all. At least with reference to mysticism, then, the well-studied structures of orientalism are not (and have never been) strictly a matter of politics or power, since the conflicts and contradictions of colonial and now postcolonial consciousness (all a function of cross-cultural encounter) have always carried within themselves powerful hermeneutical resources for examining and knowing the paradoxes of human beings in that liminal space between the worlds (once again, trauma induces insight). And this, in the end, is a philosophical, religious, and even potentially mystical enterprise. Cross-cultural encounter and hermeneutical effort are fraught with ontological risk and possibility.

Notes

1. For a lucid historical treatment of this debate, see Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
2. See especially J.C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and Olivelle, *The Āśrama System*.
3. Edward C. Dimock Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989 [1966]), 200–221.
4. For a fine introduction to this vast topic, see Purushottama Bilimoria, "Indian Ethics," in *A Companion to Ethics*, edited by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); for bibliographic

sources, see *A Bibliographic Guide to the Comparative Study of Ethics*, edited by John Carman and Mark Juergensmeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

5. For an exemplary study of the relationship between the social *dharma* and the transgressive (and ethically revolutionary) tendencies of the *bhakti* (devotion) traditions, see John Stratton Hawley, "Morality Beyond Morality in the Lives of Three Hindu Saints," in *Saints and Virtues*, edited by John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
6. For a profound treatment of this process through a Foucauldian geneaology of the category of the mystical, see Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
7. "Must Enlightened Mystics Be Moral?" (his answer, by the way, is "no"), in *Mysticism Examined: Philosophical Inquiries into Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press), 188. I highly recommend Jones's typology of mysticism and ethics. Five categories and representative traditions emerge from Jones's study: this-worldly moral action (Christianity); other-worldly moral action (Mahāyāna); this-worldly nonmoral action (Taoism); other-worldly nonmoral action (*Bhagavad Gītā*); and inaction (Advaita Vedānta). As we will see below, such a typology, particularly in its reading of Advaita, whose other-regardingness "is rendered impossible because there is no 'other' to regard" (201), fits in well with the general Indological consensus.
8. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ahsrama, 1989; Mayavati Memorial Edition), "My Master" speech, vol. 4, p. 156.
9. For three studies of this legacy, see Dermot Killingley, "Vivekananda's Western Message from the East," in *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*, edited by William Radice (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ursula King, *Indian Spirituality and Western Materialism: An Image and Its Function in the Reinterpretation of Modern Hinduism* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1985); and especially Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion.*
10. Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933 [1932]), 135; henceforth cited parenthetically in the body of the text.
11. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964; original German ed., 1922); see especially chap. 11, "Asceticism, Mysticism, and Salvation Religion."
12. Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957 [1932]).
13. Quoted in James R. Horne, *The Moral Mystic* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 13.
14. Ibid., 8–9.
15. Ninian Smart, *Reasons and Faith* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958). For his linking of the numinous and the mystical with the prophet and the mystic, see *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995), 64–65.
16. See especially Ursula King, *Towards a New Mysticism: Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).
17. Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Other Side of God: A Polarity in World Religions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1981).
18. I am not denying that such a structure has played into any number of dubious political and theological projects. Here, for example, one might place the theologizing of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who saw the encounter between West and East as a mystical marriage, with the masculine, Trinitarian, Christian West as Lord, Word, and Husband of the feminine, humble, silent, monistic, and void-like East. This is orientalism at its theological worst. For a fine, if sympathetic, treatment of this theme in von Balthasar, see Fr. Raymond Gawronski, S.J., *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balathasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995).
19. See, for example, the essays of Bose, Ramanuja, Courtright, Obeyesekere, Carstairs, Kurtz, Kakar, Nandy, and Caldwell in *Vishnu on Freud's Desk: A Reader in Psychoanalysis and Hinduism*, edited by T.G. Vaidyanathan and Jeffrey J. Kripal (New Delhi: University of

Oxford Press, 1999); for a Jungian approach, see Carmel Berkson, *The Divine and Demoniac: Mahisa's Heroic Struggle with Durga* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

20. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford Unviersity Press, 1983), 48.
21. Ibid., 36.
22. For an excellent discussion of Schweitzer's mysticism and its impact on this debate, see William F. Goodwin, "Mysticism and Ethics: An Examination of Radhakrishnan's Reply to Schweitzer's Critique of Indian Thought," *Ethics* 67, no. 1 (October 1956).
23. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1950; original German ed., 1906).
24. Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1936), vi–vii; henceforth cited parenthetically in body of text. The original German title captures better the specific concerns of the text: *Die Weltanschauung der Indischen Denker "Mystic" und "Ethik"* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1935). For other statements of Schweitzer on this issue, one should also consult his earlier volumes: *Christianity and the Religions of the World* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), originally published as *Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen* (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1924); and *The Philosophy of Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), originally published as *Kulturphilosophie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1923).
25. In the tradition of Heiler, Schweitzer understands Indian thought as mystical and monistic (virtual synonyms for him) and Western thought as dualistic and "doctrinaire" (ibid., 10).
26. Not surprisingly, the book is curiously peppered with numerous phrases and sections comparing Indic and Christian ideas and figures. Hence Śaṅkara is the "Thomas Aquinas of Brahmanism" (159), Shinran was "like Luther" (152), the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s counsel to perform actions as if one was not performing them is compared to Paul's counsel that his readers have wives in the end times as if they did not have them (186), Ramakrishna *was* "akin to Francis of Assissi" (217), and so on.
27. Indeed, as numerous scholars have pointed out, the *Gītā*, perhaps more than any other Indic text, stands solidly in the way of any simplistic equation of mystical vision and ethical activity. Gandhi may have interpreted it allegorically to fight his nonviolent battle with the British and with his own soul (Yogesh Chadha, *Gandhi: A Life* [New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997], 36), but his assassin also invoked it, in a much more literal way, to justify his act of murder (ibid., 501).
28. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 58; henceforth cited parenthetically in body of text.
29. Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kalī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna,* 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 26, 319, 361.
30. This, by the way, is clearly wrong, at least in the context of American culture where psychological researchers "have consistently found positive correlations [between piety and] . . . ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, dogmatism, social distance, rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity, and specific forms of prejudice, especially against Jews and blacks" (David M. Wulff, *The Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary* [New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997], 223). Indeed, numerous studies have shown that atheists and agnostics are more likely than deeply religious people to help those in need and to support radical social reforms (ibid., 222).
31. For a discussion of Radhakrishnan's reinterpretion of *māyā* and its centrality in this debate, see Milton D. Hunnex, "Mysticism and Ethics: Radhakrishnan and Schweitzer," *Philosophy East and West* 8, no. 3–4 (Oct. 1958–Jan. 1959).
32. In another context he translates it as "freedom" (28).
33. Michael Dummett, "Introduction" to R.C. Zaehner, *The City within the Heart* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), xii.
34. Ibid.
35. "Which God Is Dead?" in *City within the Heart*, 1–2.
36. Ibid., 2.

37. R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 132; henceforth cited parenthetically in the body of the text.
38. "Obviously," he tells his readers in another text, "the layman who is a stranger to mystical experience is in no position to distinguish between the various 'states' of the mystic" (*Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* [New York: Schocken Books, 1969 (1960)], 87).
39. Zaehner prefers this term to the more traditional "pantheism," asserting that the latter is incorrect because, technically speaking, there is no "God" present in such experiences (*Mysticism*, 28).
40. See his "The Wickedness of Evil" in *City within the Heart*. Zaehner believed that Manson had had a "classic enlightenment experience" (ibid., 38) or what Bucke calls "Cosmic Consciousness," and that it was the monistic logic of this enlightened consciousness that logically justified his gruesome murders: "The secret of Charles Manson is that he knew this timeless moment can at least be simulated by LSD and in a 'total' and brutal exercise of the physical sexual act. Lucidly he drew the obvious conclusion which most of our modern Zen Buddhists do all they can to hush up. Where he had been, all things were One and there was 'no diversity at all': he had passed beyond good and evil" (ibid., 41). In this he was living out the logic of the *Gītā*, which states clearly that "[o]n the absolute plane . . . killing and being killed are equally unreal" (ibid., 37). Or in the impeccable logic of Manson himself: "If God is One, what is bad?" (qtd. in ibid., 35).
41. Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free Press, 1993).
42. See *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, 43ff, 63, 65, 78, 101, 106, 108, 118, 125, 136, 144, 148.
43. In theological terms, Zaehner argues that such preliminary states—both those of the natural panenhenic and the more spiritual, isolation experiences—can be compared to Adam's childlike innocence in paradise or to the blissful state of souls in Limbo (ibid., 101, 128, 129, 151).
44. Zaehner is especially fond of the telling phrase "fatally easy" to describe this error (*Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, 175, 181, 187).
45. Ibid., 157.
46. Ibid., 125.
47. Ibid., 128; my italics.
48. Zaehner seemed to be especially attracted to Islam. He spent a great deal of space on its sober mystics in *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* and returned to the tradition again in "Why Not Islam?" where he noted that Islam happily escapes many of the irrational absurdities of his own Christian tradition.
49. Kripal, *Kālī's Child*.
50. *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, 85.
51. *City within the Heart*, 29–32.
52. Ibid., 80–81.
53. Ibid., 82.
54. Ibid., 46.
55. Ibid., 52.
56. Ibid., 53.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 56.
59. W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1960), 323; henceforth cited parenthetically in body of text.
60. Arthur C. Danto, *Mysticism and Morality: Oriental Thought and Moral Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), vii; henceforth cited parenthetically in body of text.
61. The adjective "perceived" seems important, as, unlike Radhakrishnan, Danto does not seem to think that mystical exeperience actually grants Indian mystics some access to the Real.
62. For a reading that takes issue with Danto on this, see Roy W. Perrett, *Hindu Ethics: A Philosophical Study* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).
63. For some responses, see Mark Rollins, ed., *Danto and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

64. Agehananda Bharati, *The Light at the Center: Pretext and Context of Modern Mysticism* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1976), 60, 68, 81; henceforth cited parenthetically in the body of the text.
65. "Radhakrishnan and the Other Vedānta," in *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1952).
66. All three books were published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press: *Beyond Mysticism* (1978); *The Moral Mystic* (1983); and *Mysticism and Vocation* (1996); all references within the body of my text, unless otherwise noted, are to *The Moral Mystic*.
67. Friedrich Heiler saw something very similar when he wrote: "Ecstasy is boiling point, Nirvana is freezing point" (*Prayer*, 140).
68. "[P]ure mysticism is very close to being rational in the strong sense, the sense in which only the requirements of logic and experimental method are to be satisfied. That is why, in fact, this form of mysticism can easily by amoral" (*Moral Mystic*, 92).
69. The mixed mystic "does, in short, appear to be much more unbalanced and disturbed, much closer to madness, than the moral religious person . . . his intensity has led him to such extremes" (ibid., 113).
70. Horne pursues this last line of thought in his latest *Mysicism and Vocation*.
71. I adopt the term from Gregory of Nyssa, who employed it to describe the infinite process of the mystical life as the winged soul ventures into the always receding depths of the Godhead; see Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, translated and introduced by Casimir McCambley O.C.S.O. (Brookline, Mass.: Hellenic College Press, 1987), 12.
72. Interestingly enough, the new moral perennialism does not follow the well-worn constructivist/perennialist lines, since a constructivist thinker such as Steven Katz—no doubt *the* constructivist thinker—ends up adopting a subtle form of moral perennialism. See, for example, his "Ethics and Mysticism in Eastern Mystical Traditions" (*Religious Studies* 28: 253–67), in which Katz adopts Radhakrishnan's and Stace's classical, if historically dubious, *tat tvam asi* ethic to read Eastern mystical texts (see chap. 6 for a discussion of this ethic's history in German idealism and neo-Hindu universalism).
73. See Richard Shweder, *Thinking Through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); and *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*, edited by James W. Stigler, Richard A. Shweder, and Gilbert Herdt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
74. Nicholas F. Gier, *Spiritual Titanism: Indian, Chinese, and Western Perspectives* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).
75. See, for example, *The Gospel of Thomas* 114, where Jesus promises to turn Mary into a man, "[f]or every female who makes herself male will enter heaven's kingdom" (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, translated by Marvin Meyer with an interpretation by Harold Bloom [HarperSanFrancisco, 1992]); and Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahāyāna Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), especially chap. 5, "The Bodhisattvas with Sexual Transformation."
76. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum*; sermons 9–10; for a good translation, see *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs I*, translated by Kilian Walsh O.C.S.O. and introduced by M. Corneille Halflants O.C.S.O. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981).
77. See Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, chap. 5.
78. The phrase is Elliot Wolfson's applied to medieval Kabbalah ("Occultation of the Feminine and the Body of Secrecy in Medieval Kabbalah," in *Rending the Veil: Secrecy and Concealment in the History of Religions,* edited by Elliot Wolfson [New York: Seven Bridges Press, 1998]), but it could just as easily be applied to Ramakrishna in nineteenth-century Bengal (see Kripal, *Kālī's Child*).
79. See especially: Sarah Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence and Worship of the Goddess Kāli* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); and the work of Richard Castillo, for example, "Spirit Possession in South Asia, Dissociation or Hysteria? Part 1:

Theoretical Background" and "Part 2: Case Histories," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 18, no. 1–2.

80. I'm thinking, of course, of Teresa of Avila's famous "mystical marriage," as described in her *Vida* (*The Book of Her Life* in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila: Volume One,* translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriquez [Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1976], 193–94).
81. Consider, for example, the description of John of the Cross in his *The Living Flame of Love*, 2.9–10. See Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979).
82. On the Kabbalistic transformations of the phallus, both human and divine, see the brilliant study of Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
83. Consider, for example, *The Gospel of Thomas* 22: "When you make the two into one . . . and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female . . . then you will enter [the kingdom]."
84. The impressive cross-cultural evidence that the mystical male is typically feminized (and often homoerotic) adds an important and complicating twist to the colonial feminization of Indian mysticism and religion, so common a topic in contemporary postcolonial theory.
85. Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
86. And these are *separate issues*; that is to say, historical accuracy and moral helpfulness will often (if not always) be at odds with one another. *No* historical mystic—from Jesus to Swami Muktananda—can be appropriated uncritically today without dire consequences, either to the historical record or to the cultural stability of the particular appropriation. A radical hermeneutics of suspicion thus must be central to any future construction of "mysticism."
87. See, for example: Lewis Carter, *Charisma and Control in Rajneeshpuram: The Role of Shared Values in the Creation of a Community* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); James S. Gordon, *The Golden Guru: The Strange Journey of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh* (Stephen Greene Press, 1987); Rosemary Hamilton, *Hellbent for Enlightenment: Unmasking Sex, Power, and Death with a Notorious Master* (Ashland, Oreg.: White Cloud Press, 1998); and Hugh B. Urban, "Zorba The Buddha: Capitalism, Charisma and the Cult of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh," *Religion* 26 (1996): 161–82.
88. Lis Harris, "O Guru, Guru, Guru." *New Yorker,* 14 November 1994, 92–109.
89. Stephen Butterfield, *The Double Mirror: A Skeptical Journey into Buddhist Tantra* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Press, 1994).
90. Jeffrey B. Rubin, *Psychotherapy and Buddhism: Toward an Integration* (New York: Plenum Press, 1996), 88.
91. For a fine psychological study of "the guru" broadly conceived, see Anthony Storr, *Feet of Clay—Saints, Sinners, and Madmen: A Study of Gurus* (New York: Free Press, 1996).
92. For a discussion of some of these problems, especially as they relate to academic writing, see my "Inside-Out, Outside-In: Existential Place and Academic Practice in the Study of North American Guru-Traditions," *Religious Studies Review* 25, no. 3.
93. Michael Stoeber addresses some of these same issues below in his essay on the guru-trickster, where he approaches Adi Da's teaching methods within the traditional transgressive logic of Tantra.
94. E. Burke Rochford Jr. with Jennifer Heinlein, "Child Abuse in the Hare Krishna Movement: 1971–1986." *ISKCON Communications Journal* 6, no. 1.
95. For a good general summary of the literature, see David Kinsley, *Religion and Ecology: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1995).
96. Lance E. Nelson, "The Dualism of Nondualism: Advaita Vedānta and the Irrelevance of Nature," in *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India,* edited by Lance E. Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998). See also his important "Reading the *Bhagavadgītā* from an Ecological Perspective," in *Hindu Ecology,* edited by Christopher Chapple and Arvind Sharma (Cambridge: Center for the Study of World Religions).
97. Nelson, "'The Dualism of Nondualism," 62.

98. Ibid., 62–63.
99. Ibid., 70.
100. Ibid., 69.
101. Ibid., 79.
102. Andrew Fort, *Jivanmukti in Transformation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 181.
103. Jones, "Must Enlightened Mystics Be Moral?" 190.
104. Of particular relevance here is the case of Emmanuel Swedenborg, whose ability to hear angelic voices, see visions, and know clairvoyantly all came to a sudden end three months before he died, immediately after he suffered an apoplectic stroke. Now "his spiritual sight of nearly 30 years was entirely gone." "More telling . . . is the apparent fact that the cerebral accident that deprived him of his spirit voices did not rob him of his own, allowing us to infer that after all that these messages originated in his 'nondominant' hemisphere" (Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*, 108).
105. See Wulff's comprehensive *Psychology of Religion,* 95–109, for an impressive review of this growing field. For a recent example of this literature, see Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).
106. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 181. Merkur makes the same point, using the telling mystical-mathematical example of Pythagoreanism, in his *Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 20.
107. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Mysticism*, 69–75; Schweitzer, *Indian Thought*, 154.
108. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Mysticism*, 109–10.
109. For a discussion of this "psychological modernity" in such figures as the Buddha and different historical mystics, see Sudhir Kakar, "Clinical Work and Cultural Imagination," in *Vishnu on Freud's Desk,* edited by Vaidyanathan and Kripal.
110. Rubin, *Psychotherapy and Buddhism*, 48–49.
111. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson's "The Psychology of the Ascetic" (*Journal of Asian Studies* 35, no. 4) remains the most forceful, provocative, and clearest statement of this thesis.
112. Kripal, *Kālī's Child*, 57–63.
113. Aurobindo's early trauma focused on his psychologically ill and physically abusive mother and manifested itself in "signs of mutism and interpersonal withdrawal, which his admirers were to later read as an early sign of spirituality" (Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, 88).
114. The death of his grandfather (when the boy was seven) persuaded Rajneesh "never to form any more close attachments for fear that a similar tragedy would follow" (Storr, *Feet of Clay,* 48).
115. James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1925), 119.
116. Kripal, *Kālī's Child*, 302–4, 317.
117. *Tao Te Ching*, poem 5 (Stephen Addis and Stanley Lombardo, trans., with an Introduction by Burton Watson [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993]).
118. Perhaps transgression is the key or linchpin to the debate about the ethical status of mysticism. Transgression, after all, contains within itself both the possibility of ethical revolution (the transgression of unjust or oppressive social structures) and the potential for moral abuse (the violation of others' integrity, safety and well-being). Often, I must point out, *both* potentialities can be present in the very same act or doctrine.
119. I am drawing here on one of William Blake's "Proverbs of Hell": "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* with an Introduction and Commentary by Geoffrey Keynes [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], plate 7.
120. Laurel C. Schneider, *Re-Imagining the Divine: Confronting the Backlash against Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 15.
121. Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, 83.

CHAPTER TWO

Debating the Mystical as the Ethical: A Response

by G. William Barnard

> *Saints are like rivers; they flow where they are directed. . . . Sometimes Saints have to do things people will misjudge, and which from the worldly point of view could be condemned. Because the world judges from appearances. . . . [But] there is no good or evil for the Creator. Only human society makes it so. A Saint is beyond good and evil. But, Saints are people of highest morality.*—Bhai Sahib, from Irina Tweedie's *The Chasm of Fire*

Introduction: Seeing with Different Eyes

Reading Jeffrey Kripal's lucid, wide-ranging, and thought-provoking assessment of the modern debate on the relationship between mysticism and ethics, I am struck, once again, by the fact that people can have such varied responses to the experiences that life offers. It seems that there is a wonderful ambiguity and freedom of interpretation built right into the structure of the universe. If we come to believe that the world is a frightening, cruel, untrustworthy place—then we will have no trouble finding plenty of evidence to support this point of view. It is also clearly possible, however, to see the same universe with very different eyes: to see it as an epiphany of God, to experience it as the body of the Buddha, to perceive it as the effortless flowing of the Tao. Regardless of whether one views the world as fundamentally untrustworthy or infinitely worthy of trust, no one denies (at least on some level) that evil and suffering exist; no one denies that there is violence, ignorance, and cruelty in this world; no one says that we should condone murder or rape. But somehow, amazingly, the mystics, in a striking variety of ways, manage to take the appalling nastinesses of this world and, in and through it all, discover a new perception, an alternative vision—a vision of underlying perfection, of cosmic hope, of unbounded joy, freedom, and love.

In many ways, as scholars of religion, it is perhaps difficult to accept the "good news" brought to us by mystics of different traditions. Many of us in the academic study of religion have often rejected an oppressive or narrow-minded religious background; or in the name of scholarly honesty, we have had to confront historical or biographical facts that have thrown our previous, often naive and simplistic faith stance into question. Many of us have found it relatively easy to align ourselves with a cynical, hard-nosed vision of the universe, especially when, after having plunged into the secular ethos of graduate school, we were taught to examine religious phenomena through a variety of very tough-minded theoretical lens, such as deconstructionism, Freudianism, Marxism, and so on. There was not much of a place in graduate school for anything tenderhearted. After our graduate training, many of us came to look upon religious phenomena—or anything that might suggest, for instance, trust in the universe or faith in some undefinable underlying perfection or openness to the possibility of spiritual transformation—with a ruthless newfound skepticism. Our disillusionment was strikingly similar to that of a child who has discovered that his or her parents are not perfect. In essence we said to ourselves: "I'm not going to be conned again."

Now, as active scholars of religion, with our vision honed razor-sharp by our hermeneutics of suspicion, we often take a type of world-weary pride in our ability to debunk pious platitudes. We cherish our grim willingness to probe beneath the saccharine surface of naive religious optimism. Is it not possible, however, that we also might need to practice a hermeneutic of suspicion on our own hermeneutics of suspicion? Is it not possible that perhaps we have conned ourselves again? Maybe the universe really is beneficent; maybe it really is a place in which everything works toward the good; maybe it really is a place in which there is help and guidance from other levels of reality, if we would only learn to open ourselves, if we would only be willing to ask, if we would only have the courage to let down our defenses, just for a moment.

Cosmic Optimism

Admittedly, believing that the universe is a loving, compassionate, caring place is risky business. Plenty of evidence to the contrary certainly exists. So when Albert Schweitzer claims that "no ethics can be won from knowledge of the Universe. Nor can ethics be brought into harmony with what we know of the Universe" (Debating, 23), when R.C. Zaehner asserts that nature "is totally indifferent to the lot of man" (Debating, 38), when these scholars and others assert that the universe, in its deepest reality, is amoral and that alignment with it does not promote a viable ethical life, then the best that can be said in reply is, "maybe so."[1] Maybe it is not possible to articulate, as Schweitzer puts it, a "mysticism of ethical world and life affirmation" (Debating, 23). I might disagree with this pessimistic

assessment, and I could draw upon articulate, rational arguments, for instance, from Henri Bergson and mystically inspired thinkers in many traditions, such as Mahāyāna Buddhism, Taoism, and Sufism to support my case. However, no matter how well crafted these arguments might be, in the end, it appears that there is no conclusive way to prove logically to someone else that underneath the very evident suffering and violence of this world, that there is something more, call it what you will: God, Consciousness, the Tao, the Ātman—a "more" that by "its" very existence answers the question posed by evil, suffering, and death.

It seems to me that, try as we may, we will never conclusively resolve this dispute. It appears that we have a stand-off, with skeptical scholars on one side and the mystics and certain scholarly optimists on the other. Yet the scales seemingly tip the other way when scholars of religion can and do offer certain types of mystical experiences as proof that even the mystics themselves at times claim that the ultimate nature of reality is amoral and threatening. Kripal, for instance, in his chapter later in this book, shares with us the vivid example of Ramakrishna's vision of the goddess Kālī eating her own children (Seeing, 230). Arjuna's terrifying vision of Kṛṣṇa's universal form in the *Bhagavad Gītā* is another favorite example. With these examples we are told, in essence: "See, not all mystics think that becoming one with God is a loving, joyous experience." But is this sober wake-up call the only way to interpret these "awe-full" visions? I would argue that the primary thrust of Ramakrishna's teachings, and those of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, is not, "Look out! Run as fast as you can! Here comes God!" While the *Gītā* and Ramakrishna certainly do claim that mystical states of union or identity can be extremely threatening to the ego and its sense of self-sufficiency, they only make this claim within an overarching context of what John Hick terms "cosmic optimism." Arjuna does not, in the end, walk away a nihilistic cynic. And I think it is safe to say that Ramakrishna did not lose his trust and faith in "Ma's" unconditional love as a result of her unusual gustatory preferences. Somehow, in and through these horrific visions, an underlying message of hope and joy remains. While the ultimate nature of reality may well best be understood as beyond the dualisms of everyday morality, and while a profound contact with this level of reality may be devastating to our ordinary sense of self, nonetheless, every mystic and saint that I know of also invites us to go there, to realize that our deepest fulfillment lies in that direction. Somehow, the mystics are not bothered by the apparent logical contradiction.

A Nondual Logic

It appears, however, that Kripal and many of the authors he discusses are very much bothered by many of the logical contradictions inherent within mystical life. For instance, Kripal notes in his discussion of Schweitzer that it does not make logical sense for Buddhist and Hindu thinkers to claim that an "ethical,

relative, lower, exoteric truth" can and does coexist with a "mystical, absolute, higher, esoteric truth" (Debating, 25). But is this notion of two interconnected truths, one relative and the other absolute, really so unreasonable? To claim that evil and suffering and duality exist on one level of reality, but not on another, is a common enough claim in many mystical traditions. Maybe it does not fit in nicely with our typical Aristotelian, "either/or" logic, but who says that Brahman (or the Tao, or whatever you want to call Ultimate Reality) has to? Indeed, isn't that the point—that this Ultimate Reality is beyond the dualisms that logic typically assumes?

It seems that this attachment to Aristotelian logic is at the root of many of Kripal's objections. This attachment can take a variety of forms, but two of the favorites are "That which is One cannot also be Many" and "That which is transmoral cannot also be moral." Following this impeccable logic, Kripal can legitimately claim in his later chapter in this text that monism "logically and structurally must deny" a Christian love ethic (Seeing, 234), since Christianity is dualistic in structure and monism is not. Therefore, as Kripal notes, any philosophical attempts, whether by Paul Deussen, Arthur Schopenhauer, or implicitly Vivekananda, to ground the Christian edict "love thy neighbor" in an underlying monistic union with that neighbor you are enjoined to love is "forced" (Seeing, 233). I am willing to admit that perhaps Kripal and Paul Hacker are correct, that Advaita Vedānta was not historically used to provide metaphysical grounding for loving, ethical interactions with others. But I am not so clear why it philosophically *could* not; why, as Kripal puts it, monism "inevitably" exists "in significant tension with any ethical system that presupposes a real agent and a real other" (Debating, 58).

Perhaps one way to overcome this problem is to point out that many of the philosophical and religious understandings that Kripal refers to as "monism" can, at least in certain instances, be interpreted as "nondualism"—and there is a difference. Monism says that all is One. Nondualism says that all is not many, but refuses to say anything specific about what "it" is. Basically, a nondual theoretical perspective claims that all of our normal philosophical categories simply do not apply to the nature of Ultimate Reality and that any positive statements about Ultimate Reality must be understood as metaphorical, at best.[2]

Admittedly, nondualism is not always internally consistent. For instance, there are many descriptions of what Brahman is in Advaita Vedānta; for example, Brahman is One, eternal, unchanging, and so on. But I would argue that these descriptions can and should be understood as superseded and relativized by other, more fundamental claims; for example, Brahman is beyond the mind, beyond all words, beyond all descriptions. If these types of apophatic, negative statements are understood to have philosophical priority over any and all cataphatic, positive descriptions, then this type of philosophical perspective, I would argue, is nondualism, not monism. And from a nondual perspective, to say that "All is

One" is no more true (at least in a literal sense) than to say that "All is many." If this is the case, then you might as well say, metaphorically at least, that all is *both* many *and* one, and yet really neither.

This sort of apophatic reasoning is quite appealing. My own metaphysical vision assumes it as a touchstone. The wonderful thing about nondualism and apophatic reasoning is that it opens up theoretical space that can then be filled, not only with metaphorical statements but also with paradox. So, while nondualists (including many mystics) will claim that the ultimate nature of reality is beyond any and all descriptions (even, ironically, the description that it is beyond any and all descriptions), you can also find positive statements (especially in Zen, Tantra, Taoism, some schools of Sufism, and in the writings of certain Jewish and Christian mystics) that speak, again, metaphorically and paradoxically, of unity-in-diversity, that claim that life is best described as *both* many *and* one—at the same time. This sort of paradoxical perspective allows me to appreciate the insights of Western thought, at least since the Enlightenment, which typically stress the uniqueness, beauty, and rights of each individual, while it also allows me to see these individuals not as isolated monads, cut off from each other, but as integral, yet ever changing, expressions of a greater, dynamically interconnected whole.[3]

Coming from this both/and perspective, it seems unnecessarily confining to claim, as Schweitzer does, that "genuine ethics demands a real difference between egos" (Debating, 25). While this claim may seem self-evident to Schweitzer, it certainly isn't to me and, I suspect, to others who have a more open-ended, paradoxical understanding of selfhood.

My best guess is that most practicing nondualists do not make ethical decisions based on the either/or thinking of Aristotelian logic. Instead, most of the nondualists that I have encountered recognize the limits of language and are very comfortable with paradox. They have no problems with praying to a personal God in the morning and then meditating on the transpersonal Self during the afternoon.[4] For them, what is spiritually important is not logical precision, but transformative effect. Aristotelian logic, with its either/or thinking, might well have an important place in certain aspects of life (e.g., "either I get in the car, or I do not"), but it is unnecessarily constricting in the realm of spiritual praxis. In this realm of experience, both/and thinking seems to be much more valuable and possibly much more true.

If we are willing to accept a paradoxical, both/and way of understanding reality, then the *tat tvam asi* ethic (in which you treat everyone with love because you see them as manifestations of the divine) that Hacker thought was so "monstrous" (Seeing, 234) begins to make much more sense. Seeing the divine within everyone implies both/and thinking. If the divine cosmic self is within each of your neighbors, the implicit assumption is that manyness and oneness can and do coexist.

A Problematic Oneness

Kripal appears to have ethical reservations, however, with the notion of seeing God in everyone. For instance, in his later chapter in this book, he finds fault with Ramakrishna for telling a devotee that he should not delude himself into thinking that he is helping anyone, because, according to Ramakrishna, he is really only helping his own true self, the God in all. Kripal claims that when Ramakrishna offers this insight to his disciple, he is actually engaging in "a reversal of the *tat tvam asi* ethic" (Seeing, 246).

I will admit that Kripal's interpretation puzzled me at first. It seemed to me that Ramakrishna's admonition to his disciple was a very clear expression of the *tat tvam asi* ethic (which says, in essence, love your neighbor because you are one with him or her). Both Ramakrishna's claim and the *tat tvam asi* ethic are rooted in the notion that God is present within everyone and everything. The way I understood Ramakrisha's statement is that he was simply underscoring that, if "we" think that "we" are helping "them," we are not correct, because we are still coming from a place of ego and separation. The reality is that we are one with them and they are one with us.

I will also concede, however, that if Ramakrishna used this metaphysical claim of divine oneness to say *don't bother helping anyone because they are already fine as they are, since they are really the perfect and utterly fulfilled divine Self*, then I can understand Kripal's concern. While it seems that it is completely legitimate to say that everything, as it is, is perfect, it also seems a mistake to say that just because everything is perfect you need not, or even worse should not, fight against injustice or seek to make life better for others. The problem is how to understand the meaning of "perfection." If perfection were to be understood as an ever-new experience of being—as an experience embodied moment to moment—rather than as a static state of accomplishment, then there is nothing to suggest that, for example, fighting for social justice or doing charitable deeds is any less an expression of perfection than sitting in samādhi on a mountain top. The perfection of the Self may well be present, for example, in the sufferings of a crippled, emaciated child, lying abandoned in the streets of Calcutta; but it could just as well be found in the compassionate heart of someone from Mother Teresa's order giving that child food, shelter, and medical assistance.

Therefore, I am willing to grant that Ramakrishna could legitimately be faulted, if his claim of monistic oneness was used to justify social indifference. Further, if, as Kripal points out, monism is pushed to its logical extremes and is used to encourage an attitude that minimizes the value of individual differences and uniqueness, then I have no argument with him. I agree with many of Kripal's reservations about monism, especially with his cautionary comment that, since monism claims that individual selves do not really exist, then the next step might easily be to conclude that there is "no human person worth tending to" (Seeing, 246).

However, just because there are ethical problems with monism, that does not mean that we should necessarily rush to adopt dualism as our new savior. There are plenty of ethical problems with dualism, if it is pushed to its logical limits as well. For instance, if we think that there is only utter diversity, if we believe that there is nothing that connects us to another person, if others are seen as completely different from us, then that implicit dualistic understanding can easily lead to the insidious assumption, for instance, that these "others" are so foreign to us that they are not really human and can therefore be tortured, raped, or killed with impunity. I would claim that most of the ethical problems we suffer from on this earth actually stem from this sort of distorted dualism, not from the errors of an overly zealous monism.

Like Kripal, I am by no means an advocate of monism. I do think it has been used to encourage social indifference and a lack of respect for individual uniqueness. Nevertheless, if it is used "softly," if it is simply understood to promote a vision in which you see the light of God in everyone and everything, that understanding, I would claim, is highly preferable to one that does not recognize a common divinity (and hence humanity) in each person.

I would argue that we would be better off tossing out both monism and dualism in favor of a nondual, both/and, paradoxical metaphysics—one that cherishes both unity and diversity. If we start with metaphysical flexibility, then there is at least a greater chance that our ethics will be similarly fluid. For instance, while we might tell ourselves that the ultimate truth is that we are much more than the mind/body (and we might have even had mystical glimpses of this truth), we might also recognize that as long as we experientially identify with our own unique mind/body complex in our day-to-day existence, then it is probably a good idea to follow traditional, dualistic ethical guidelines—usually the ones that have been embedded within our mind/body since we were children. Therefore, even if we are convinced that our true nature is utterly pure and utterly free, as long as this is not an ongoing fact of our experience, we probably should act according to social moral guidelines or be willing to pay the consequences if we do not.[5]

Enlightened Ethics

The only time we might get ourselves into trouble is if our ethical life does not match up with our level of awareness—or to put it another way, if we make ethical decisions based solely on metaphysical *theories* instead of metaphysical *experience*. The story that Kripal narrates in his later chapter, of the king who rationalizes his adultery with monistic platitudes, makes exactly this point (Seeing, 243–44). It is all well and good for the king to claim that he is free to have sex with any woman, since all women are the same self, but that wonderfully convenient theory of divine oneness quickly vanishes when his wife, in order to test his alleged mystical vision of oneness, brings him food to eat that is mixed with feces.

Unlike this hypocritical king, however, there are numerous stories of enlightened beings who actually were willing to eat feces with their food, either literally or metaphorically. (My personal favorite is Swami Muktananda's account of his encounter with an Indian *siddha* called Zippruana. Muktananda claims that he went to meet Zippruanna, and saw him rubbing feces over his naked body. Nonetheless, Zippruana still emitted a sweet fragrance.)[6] For enlightened beings, the oneness of life is said to be an ongoing experience, not just a theory—an experience that is expressed and embodied in every moment of their daily lives.

However, even enlightenment does not come free from ethical ambiguity, at least in the social arena. There is no guarantee that, if this king actually was enlightened, he would not have had sex with other women besides his wife. The ethical norms of society do not seem to bind the actions of enlightened beings—at least this has been so quite often, historically. The question is whether sex with these women is impelled by egoistic motivations, such as the king's need for sexual release or to prove his prowess, or whether it is an expression of perfection in the moment, or perhaps a freely offered manifestation of love, compassion, and concern for the long-term well being of these women. *If* his enlightenment was truly authentic and profound, *if* he was fully merged with a reality that is the source of wisdom and compassion (even as it transcends the humanly created duality of good and evil), *if* his enlightenment was truly incarnated in every action, then sex with these women would not necessarily be unethical. Unconstrained by social moral standards, yet fully attuned to the dynamic flux of life, could not the enlightened being spontaneously be responding to the needs of each situation, effortlessly flowing with and expressing the perfection that manifests in each moment? If enlightenment is understood in this way, then every action of the enlightened being—even if it appears to be socially inappropriate—could, arguably, be understood as aligned with the greatest good.

Clearly, however, Kripal and many others would not agree with this claim. Kripal apparently supports Arthur Danto's critique of *mokṣa* (or enlightenment). Danto notes that this state of awareness is "beyond good and evil, and so beyond morality" (Debating, 44). For Danto, and seemingly for Kripal as well, an enlightened being is not a loving, divinely guided expression of cosmic compassion, but instead is utterly amoral. If this understanding is true, then we would have no reason to suppose that an enlightened being could not, or would not, be a murderer or rapist.

But are there many, if any, reliable accounts of enlightened beings who willfully or wantonly murdered or raped someone? The major source of ethical indifference or pathological behavior (true amorality) does not seem to be mystical awareness of oneness with the divine, but rather is a *lack* of this expanded awareness. While on the surface, an amoral person and a transmoral person might appear identical, a deeper examination reveals, I would claim, profound differ-

ences. A half-naked man up in a tree throwing twigs and abuse at a crowd gathered below could either be insane or enlightened, depending on his inner state of being. Amoral (or insane) people, I argue, feel deeply separated and isolated from others, are filled with unconscious self-loathing, and are ruled by their egoistic passions and desires. Transmoral people, I would argue, however, experience an ongoing, deeply loving connection with others (whether or not their external behavior is understood to be compassionate or loving); have transcended their identification with the ego (even while expressing, perhaps, a strong, idiosyncratic personality); and are utterly free expressions of universal wisdom and compassion. Amoral people impulsively and destructively act upon whatever their passions demand. Transmoral people, by contrast, spontaneously and without ego, free from harmful intent, respond to the inner promptings of their own deepest Self, a Self experienced as present within all.

Notice that I am not claiming here that there are actual, historical individuals who are completely free from ego, who are fully identified with this cosmic "more." However, there are numerous accounts of individuals who *appear* to have come very close to this normative and open-ended ideal—individuals who have had numerous profound, life-altering mystical experiences and as a result, for the most part, act fluidly, freely, and compassionately in a way that is ethically appropriate to each situation.

Mystical Transformations

Kripal, however, seems to think that individuals who have mystical experiences are by no means ethical exemplars, but instead are typically ethical misfits. In fact, Kripal is so focused on uncovering the abnormal, bizarre activities of various mystics that he, like Agehananda Bharati, is even willing to claim that mysticism is that which is "*illicit* in both its motivation and its pursuit" (Debating, 46); or, to put it another way, that the mystical "inevitably tends toward the transgressive, the ascetic, and the extreme" (Debating, 33).

It is difficult for me to understand how Kripal can make this claim. It might well be accurate to say, at least in certain instances, as Bharati does, that mystics are "an embarrassment to the established order," or that they are "marginal" people (Debating, 46). But it is an oversimplification to say that mystics are "inevitably" marginal, extreme, or transgressive. A quick glance at the hotbeds of mystical life in various times and places, such as the hierarchical position of Christian monasteries in the Middle Ages, or at the social status of Sufi orders in the Near East, or at the prominence and power of Zen centers in Japan, or at the political and economic clout of the Tantric Buddhist monasteries in Tibet is enough to demonstrate that mystics are not, as Bharati claims, always "an embarrassment to the established order" or are always individuals who are "inimical to the ecclesiastic" (Debating, 46).

I would argue that it is almost always problematic to say that mysticism is "always" this or that—to claim that mysticism is always moral or that it is always amoral, or to claim that it is always divinely inspired or it is always a perverse illusion or aberration. Mysticism is an ambiguous, complex, multifaceted phenomena. To focus solely on either positive or negative examples of mysticism is to deny this complexity in favor of a theoretical perspective that may have an appealing simplicity, but which will have a strong tendency either to ignore or deny data that does not fit within its Procrustean bed.

Having said this, I must also admit it seems that after centuries of overlooking the flaws and failings of saints and mystics, that the pendulum has now perhaps swung too far in the other direction. There is a growth industry of "sexy" and eye-catching studies (including, ironically, this one) that focus primarily on the transgressive, illicit qualities of mystics, studies that debunk and dismiss and disparage previous understandings of mysticism as naive and unsophisticated. But in our zeal to correct the previous overidealization of mysticism, I think that we often overlook those qualities of mystical life that are not as easy to document as the aberrations and excesses—the softer heart, the increased radiance, the clarity of perception, the stillness of mind that is also an integral aspect of mystical life. The kooks and the cons leap off the page, whereas the people whose lives have been transformed by mysticism, the thousands of anonymous "saints," are much more difficult to document and discern.

These individuals, even more than the St. Francises of this world, are the best evidence against Bharati's claim that having a mystical experience does not lead to positive ethical changes in a person. While we can read about the stunning conversions that took place in the lives of the stellar saints enshrined in the pages of history, these accounts are typically two-dimensional hagiographies in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to get an accurate and well-rounded picture of the real person who is hidden behind the often breathless and adoring prose. What is truly convincing is having witnessed, either within yourself or in the lives of those you know well, the life-altering ethical and psychological transformations that are possible for those who have dedicated themselves with great sincerity to some spiritual path and who have been blessed with frequent and profound mystical experiences. These individuals, more than any logical arguments or rousing rhetoric, make a mockery of Bharati's claim that mystical experiences have "absolutely no effect on one's moral character" (Debating, 46).

Some of the stories of contemporary "enlightened" individuals, however, are admittedly eye-opening also. I am friends with one man who is a disciple of a well-known contemporary female Hindu spiritual teacher, Mata Amritanandamayi. He told me the following account: A few years ago in India he was greeting people who had come for Amritanandamayi's blessings, when he saw a leper, covered with oozing sores, and sending off a repellent odor, hobbling toward the

entrance to the meditation hall. Several of Amritanandamayi's more ardent disciples forcibly attempted to prevent the man from entering, but when she learned what was going on, she insisted that this man come immediately to the front of the line of people waiting to see her. When the leper approached her, Amritanandamayi promptly scooped him up into her lap and lovingly began to caress him and whisper to him. Ultimately, she even began to lick the sores on the man's body (a response that apparently caused not a few of her disciples to run out of the room gagging). In the end, after many visits to Amritanandamayi, all of the leper's sores were healed, except for one, which she told him would remain, so that he would always have a reason to pray to God.

While hagiographical accounts of Amritanandamayi might paint her as a living embodiment of divinity from the moment of birth, I think that it is safe to say that she was not always this "saintly."[7] Her many difficult years ardently practicing spiritual disciplines and her countless profound mystical experiences clearly initiated profound changes in her behavior in the world. In her case at least, as well in the lives of many other mystics, Bharati's claim that "the genuine mystic as a person . . . remains the person he was before—a king, a knave, a dentist" (Debating, 46) is flat-out wrong.

It would have made sense if Bharati had said that having a mystical experience does not *necessarily* lead to positive ethical changes in a person. Mystical experiences come with no ironclad guarantees. The transformative effect of a mystical experience is closely bound up with the total context in which that experience takes place. Within this overall context, I would argue that there are two factors that most strongly influence whether mystical experiences will catalyze ethical changes within an individual: metaphysical assumptions and intent.

Everyone has within themselves a vast network of assumptions (whether explicit or implicit) about the nature of reality and the self that powerfully affect how they interpret and understand all of their life experiences, including mystical experiences. As I mapped out in chapter 2 of *Exploring Unseen Worlds*, my previous book on William James and the philosophy of mysticism, these various internalized belief systems actually contribute, at least partially, to how we will *experience* mystical phenomena. Whenever we make life decisions we draw upon this ever-changing gestalt of beliefs and experiences—and these decisions and actions, in turn, affect our future beliefs and experiences. For example, a narrow-minded, dogmatic fundamentalist (of whatever stripe) might have a powerful mystical experience. This experience, in turn, might be interpreted by this fundamentalist as a divine sanction of his or her rigid set of beliefs, and consequently, might well lead to an even deeper level of exclusivism, intolerance, and possibly even violence. In the same way, a philosophically trained, hedonistic skeptic such as Bharati, who is already convinced (at least later in his life) that mystical experiences have "no ontological implications of any sort" (Debating, 46)—that they are simply psychological in nature—might have a mystical experience, but the

preset limitations that he has already imposed on the transformative potential of the experience could make it such that, when he has a mystical experience, it merely serves to affirm and deepen his previous intellectual cynicism.

It is important to stress, however, that mystical experiences do not always simply put a stamp of approval on a person's prior beliefs. In many cases our previous tacit set of assumptions can themselves be dramatically altered by the powerful "content" of mystical experiences—cases in which atheists become believers, and sinners become saints. These experiences, as William James and others have amply documented, can often radically challenge an individual's worldview and can catalyze a profound, life-altering change of heart.[8]

The other factor that seems to increase the possibility that mystical experiences will produce positive ethical changes within a person is intent. If a person consciously enters into a life of spiritual disciplines seeking (in addition to becoming enlightened or united with God, for instance) to become a more open, loving, insightful person, then it is very likely that this baseline intention will be nurtured and supported by whatever mystical experiences take place within the individual. In the same way, if a person engages in spiritual practices with no overt desire for any positive character changes to occur (or worse, is prompted by a desire for fame, egoistic gratification, power, and so forth), then there is no reason to think that the mystical experiences that occur within this individual will necessarily produce positive ethical changes (although, again, they might).

For instance, people who meditate primarily to learn how to calm and focus their mind might have powerful mystical experiences, but if they do not shift the underlying intention of their practice as a result of these experiences, it is doubtful whether they will undergo the depth of ethical changes that are available to people who meditate in order to realize and incarnate in the world the compassion and wisdom of, for example, their inherent Buddha nature. Similarly, if individuals undergo vision quests in order to receive guidance and assistance from the spirits so that they can become more effective and loving healers within their communities, the visionary experiences that they receive will doubtless affect them differently than if they were fasting and praying to the spirits in order to gain the supernatural power needed to send harmful magical darts to destroy their enemies.

Therefore, since it appears (at least later in his life) that Bharati was not consciously seeking to have mystical experiences for their transformative effect, is it any wonder that he did not see any ethical changes within himself? In addition, is it any wonder that, if he saw no positive moral changes within himself as a result of his own mystical experiences, he would claim that these changes could not happen to others as well?[9]

Like Kripal, I believe that the morality of mystics is affected by the "social 'surround' in which [they] find themselves"; but unlike Kripal, I would argue that this morality is not reducible to the effects of that "surround" (Debating, 61).

Although he says that there "is not something internal or 'natural' to the phenomenology of the monistic-mystical experience itself," which impacts the moral development of mystics, I would disagree (Debating, 61). The cultural milieu and psychological background of the mystics, as well as the choices they make from their free will, crucially effects their moral stature. But the ethical status of a mystic is not just the result of these, admittedly crucial, life experiences. In addition, it also receives a powerful "boost" from the mystical experiences themselves.

The Value of Mystical Awareness

But even if Kripal would be willing to admit that individuals could become wise and loving and compassionate as a result of their mystical experiences, it seems that this internal transformation does not count for much if it does not lead to tangible social change. Ramakrishna may claim (as Kripal notes in his later chapter in this book) that the purpose of life is to revel in the awareness of God at every moment; he may claim that eating the delightful mango of "God's love and presence in the garden of existence" (Seeing, 238) is inherently worthwhile, but according to Kripal, "eating mangos, however delightful they might be" is hardly a worthwhile way to spend one's time, since indulging in this mystically sweet pleasure will not help us overcome evil, will not "rid the world of its Genghis Khans" (Seeing, 239).

In order to get rid of the Genghis Khans of this world, what is needed, apparently, is a good, bracing dose of social ethics. In a manner that is strikingly similar to the followers of the turn-of-the-century Christian social gospel movement, what really seems to count for Kripal are good works. The assumption is that a person is not really living a full-fledged moral life unless he or she is doing overt, socially sanctioned good deeds. The real saints of this world are not eccentric, self-absorbed swamis and fakirs, but instead, are those upright, stalwart missionaries of good who work with the sick, who build schools, who improve sanitation, who stand up against social injustice.[10]

This orientation toward the primacy of social change makes sense in the West, where we value "doing" over "being," where people are assessed by what they have accomplished in the world, instead of by their level of spiritual development or other less socially active criteria. Those who do not value worldly success, who prefer a life of contemplation, who spend their time in mystical states of absorption are looked upon by most of us in the West with suspicion and bewilderment. For all of our alleged openness to individual uniqueness and cultural diversity, we seem to have a hard time accepting the value of a religiously inspired life that is not overtly spent doing good deeds.

From a certain point of view, our intolerance of this mode of life might be warranted. It may well be the case, as Schweitzer put it, that mysticism is often intertwined with a perspective that negates life and the world, and is, therefore, at least in those cases, limited to a "non-active ethic" (Debating, 23). There are nu-

merous examples of Eastern mystical traditions (Advaita Vedānta and Theravāda Buddhism in particular) that strongly stress renunciation and ascetic practices (even though the institutional centers of these traditions were also often important contributors to the educational and political life of their communities). In addition, most, if not all, mystics at some stage in their spiritual life (usually toward the beginning) go through a period of withdrawal, of disengagement from ordinary life, and ascetic forms of self-denial.

However, are there really no ethical merits to asceticism and renunciation? A closer look reveals that these world-denying perspectives on life promote, for instance, a strong, if at times implicit, critique of our typical limited and self-serving ways of understanding ourselves and the world around us; they point out the distortions and suffering caused by our obsessive craving for fulfillment from money, power, and prestige; they recognize the value of time spent turning within in contemplation and meditation; they stress that it is important to spend time wrestling with the inner demons of pride, self-hatred, aggression, and shame. It seems to me that all of these understandings are valuable and needed contributions to a world that is often blinded to its own materialistic excesses and spiritual failures.

I would argue that there is tremendous value in periods of spiritual retreat, in time spent that is dedicated purely to inner work, even if those who immerse themselves in such a life are seen (correctly or not), in Bishop Creighton's words, "as good as gold and fit for heaven but of no earthly use," even if contemplative life "is a type of inactive activity that has little impact on the physical and social world" (Debating, 32). If all of life actually is interconnected, if we are not confined to the boundaries of our mind/body (and I believe that good arguments can be made to support these beliefs), then our state of being matters, not just our external actions. If such an account of reality is accurate, then the more that we succeed in reconnecting to the universal source of life within ourselves, the more we will powerfully effect others simply by our state of being.

If our inner state of awareness does radiate outward to others, then the countless testimonies in the mystical literature of people who claim to have been transformed just by sitting in the presence of enlightened beings or saints begin to make sense. In these testimonies we hear that a simple word, or touch, or even just a glance, from such awakened, spiritually developed people was sufficient to give life new meaning. One such story is in *Hidden Journey*, where Andrew Harvey describes how his cynical and nihilistic worldview was radically transformed as a result of his interactions with Mother Meera, a contemporary Hindu spiritual teacher.

In one early informal encounter, Harvey claims that Meera "did something from which my life never recovered."[11] As he was putting on his shoes outside of her apartment, Meera opened the door. What Harvey experienced filled him with awe:

> All around her . . . was a blaze of Light—white diamond light—all the brighter for being in the darkness of the doorway. I began to tremble and perspire. The Light streamed from her . . . I gazed at it around Meera, hardly able to believe what I was seeing. That it emanated from her and not from any other source was unmistakable; beyond any doubt I was seeing with open eyes the Divine Light and Meera burning in it.[12]

Harvey goes on to note that the days after this encounter were ones of "total turmoil," as his ego struggled against this powerful revelation of God's presence manifesting in and through a rather obscure Indian woman.[13] Nonetheless, in the days and years that followed, he began to have countless powerful and profound experiences of the oneness of life and felt a new and powerful awareness of divine love within himself, an awareness that he claims was effortlessly catalyzed, not only by this initial opening, but also by his ongoing contact with Mother Meera.[14]

If stories such as Harvey's are accurate, and I have no reason to doubt that they usually are, then perhaps we need to open up the parameters of the criteria by which we judge the ethical merits of another's life (always a rather dicey prospect at best). Perhaps the universe does not just need social reformers, but a whole spectrum of people responding in different ways to their own unique gifts and inclinations. Perhaps it is the job of enlightened beings to energize, enliven, inspire, and uplift those who come to be with them, and this task is worthy of tremendous respect on its own merits. This is the case, whether or not they and their energized disciples also can, and often do, build plenty of hospitals and schools and feed plenty of hungry children.

Not all saints and enlightened beings, even in the East, spent their lives in isolated monasteries or retreats, nor were they all, as Radhakrishnan put it, homeless ascetics wandering aimlessly from place to place, without any type of ongoing interaction with the world at large. While the historical evidence is rather sketchy, it seems clear that Gautama Buddha and Śaṅkara, for instance, were engaged in teaching, debating, counseling their disciples, travelling from one place to another, and setting up institutional structures for the continuation of their mission. In more recent times, Sufi saints, such as Rumi and Ibn al'Arabi, as well as countless Zen masters, were equally active in these ways. But it seems that this sort of spiritually based activity does not count for much, at least in comparison to the more comfortably Western, and implicitly Christian, activity of, for example, tending to the sick or feeding the homeless.

It is important to reemphasize that contemplative life has its own inherent value. Even extremely activist religious founders, such as Jesus and Muhammad, appear to have dedicated substantial time and energy to contemplative practice. As I mention above, profound spiritual growth often seems to require extended periods of isolation from the hustle and bustle of the world. If we have hidden

within us tremendous untapped potentials of love, wisdom, and power (which many, if not most, mystics have claimed), and if these potentials are often most easily and quickly accessed and unfolded by the focused practice of spiritual disciplines, then perhaps we can acknowledge that a life spent, for instance, meditating, praying, chanting, and studying the scriptures has at least some merit.

It seems that Kripal does not think so, however, noting that "in the watery depths of the Godhead, it seems, there is little, if any, chance one could find enough stable ground upon which to construct a socially active religious vision" (Seeing, 250). But is Kripal correct? As he points out, Vivekananda certainly did not think so. In fact, it is arguably the case that Vivekananda's extremely active life and the social work that he initiated in the Ramakrishna Order was directly the result of his own baths in that mystical ocean.

Kripal, however, seems to believe that we would be better, more moral people, if we stayed safely dry on the shore, separated from the ocean of mystical awareness in our hearts. Many people would agree with Kripal—those who choose to fight stoically against social injustice, who willfully strive to do good deeds, with no conscious connection to any deeper source of spiritual power. Sometimes this strategy is effective. Not all positive social change has been spiritually inspired and empowered. But often this strategy simply does not work. Many ardent social reformers either end up burnt out and bitter—or as with those who fought for the communist revolution, their good intentions and their passion for social reform only served to bring about a mutated form of the very thing that they were fighting against in the first place.

I would like to think that there is another option. I would like to think that we might learn to appreciate the value of a profound and intense spiritual life. I would like to think that we could recognize the worth of spending time diving into that mystical ocean, learning how to swim in it, learning how to joyously align ourselves with its subtle and powerful currents.

This type of intense spiritual immersion does not necessarily mean that we will be drowned, swept away from the shore of our everyday existence by mystical riptides. The waves of this ocean inevitably, and repeatedly, crash back against the beach. Many, if not all, mystical traditions acknowledge the value of returning to the world with a transformed vision, purified of ego, selflessly serving others. Ultimately, to change metaphors, we can, as is illustrated in the final ox-herding picture of the Zen tradition, return to the marketplace, joyously distributing a sackful of gifts to the children. Or to use metaphors drawn from Christian mysticism, we can, while united with God in a spiritual marriage and carrying with us the ecstasy of our spiritual betrothal, serve God and experience His love in and through our service to others. Or as in Sufism, we can emerge from the ego dissolution and mystical union of *fana* in order to enter into *baqa*, where we can, moment by moment, act as transparent vehicles of Allah's presence, power, and mercy in the world.

An Ideal Moral Mysticism

The understanding that it is possible to dive into the ocean of mystical awareness and then return transformed to a life of selfless service assumes, of course, that in some form or another, this ocean has our best interests at heart. Kripal, for one, seems to doubt that this is the case. For instance, he questions the truth of W.T. Stace's contention that "love and compassion are actually parts of the mystical consciousness" (Debating, 42). Stace asserts that love and compassion are part of the underlying warp and woof of the universe based on the fact that mystics repeatedly claim to have had experiences of this cosmic beneficence. But Kripal is not convinced. He notes, archly, that "significantly, no mystic is quoted" by Stace to back up his claim (Debating, 42).[15] It seems that, from Kripal's perspective, mystics may well have experiences in which they merge with "something" that is powerful and vast, "something" that transcends the boundaries of their individual egos, but it does not appear that he is so sure that this "something" is necessarily loving or that "it" necessarily cares for us as individuals.

According to Kripal, "the historical evidence is neither unambiguous nor particularly kind to Stace's theory" (Debating, 42). Kripal's wording itself is somewhat ambiguous, but it seems that he is *either* arguing that mystics (such as those in the Advaita Vedānta tradition?) do not, in fact, claim that the underlying ontological substratum of the universe is beneficent and/or loving *or* that, if they do make this claim, then their antinomian and/or immoral actions do not support this metaphysical perspective of the universe. Kripal states that even Stace recognizes this problem and attempts to deal with it by "identifying mysticism with an ideal moral mysticism (which can only be 'found' by some very selective and ingenious readings) and by declaring any tradition that falls short of this ideal 'an abuse of mysticism'" (Debating, 42).

Up to a point, I agree with Kripal's objections to Stace's attempt to label those examples of mysticism that do not live up to his "ideal moral mysticism" as "an abuse" (Debating, 42). This strategy automatically, and arbitrarily, screens out any historical or biographical data that might reveal aspects of mysticism that are not as perfect as we might like. Kripal's point is well taken. As scholars of religion, it is crucial that we do not succumb to the temptation to overlook, or more seriously, to cover up, those features of the lives and teachings of mystics that do not live up to our previous, perhaps idealized, image of what mysticism should be. Kripal is correct to warn us against the assumption that some clear-cut, exemplary mysticism exists against which we can measure all the others. To one degree or another, human distortions are probably always present in every mystical tradition. It is crucial that we have a nonnaive understanding of mystics and saints, that we are aware of their human failings, and that, if it is warranted, we have the clarity, and if necessary, the courage, to subject them to an intensive ethical critique.

However, while I think that Stace does keep mysticism confined within overly narrow, idealized parameters, I would argue that it is nonetheless legitimate for Stace to claim that distortions of mysticism do exist. Aligning myself with the methodology articulated by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, I think that it is important not only to describe mystical phenomena, but also to come to certain normative conclusions based on careful research. If scholars of religion proceed carefully, making their criteria clear, then it is possible and necessary to point out what appear to be distortions of mysticism.

Therefore, if a mystic teaches that God is Love, yet also preaches in support of a bloody crusade against the infidels, we can, and should, be willing to say that this is a distortion of that mystic's basic, mystically inspired insight. I am not claiming here that this individual is not a mystic because of this distortion. What is particularly exasperating (and intriguing) to me is that it seems clear that severe psychological and/or ethical distortions can coexist with great spiritual power and mystical insights. Nonetheless, some levels of ethical misconduct are so severe that, if anyone engages in them, we can and should dismiss that person's alleged mystical status.[16] For instance, if Charles Manson legitimizes murder with monistic rationalizations that were supposedly gained through his mystical states of oneness, then we need to be able to declare that he is a psychopath, rather than an enlightened sage. Manson may well have had a few powerful mystical insights, but a handful of mystical experiences did not make him a mystic, to say nothing of enlightened.

The Antinomian Challenge

Nonetheless, as Kripal points out in his insightful observations on contemporary gurus, there are clearly numerous advanced mystics, thought to be enlightened by their followers, who have engaged in behavior that is ethically problematic, at best. While these gurus were not psychopathic killers like Manson, clearly their level of mystical attainment was also much more significant. Therefore, their antinomian behavior, as well as that of numerous other mystics throughout history, does raise important questions.

There are numerous ways to respond to the "antinomian challenge" to the claim that mysticism is closely, and positively, linked to ethics. First, it is important to stress that profound mystical openings do not automatically and inevitably lead to positive character changes. In the same way that a child can be raised in a loving household and later in life still choose to act in destructive, hurtful ways toward others, even advanced mystics who have had numerous powerful experiences of merger with the deepest levels of reality can still decide to behave in ways that are harmful to others. Pride, delusion, and narcissistic self-involvement are insidious; they may still be present, under the surface of self-awareness, even in quite advanced mystics.

Second, many mystics who are seen by others, and by themselves, as being spiritually evolved, may actually be stuck in a fairly rudimentary stage of spiritual life. As R.C. Zaehner and Kripal point out, powerful mystical experiences, instead of making a person humble and thankful, have the potential to create dangerous levels of ego-inflation. Mystical glimpses of expanded consciousness and inner freedom, when not integrated and assimilated, may well convince the mystics that they are free from normal moral restrictions when, in reality, they are simply using a profound and potentially valuable mystical insight to justify and rationalize arrogantly self-serving immoral behavior.

Third, it is possible that the antinomian behavior of various mystics actually is entirely appropriate, that it comes from a place of deep insight and love, but we as "prudish scholars," (Debating, 47), rush to judge and condemn it simply because it upsets our ethical sensibilities. While we do not want to naively accept at face value the claims of various antinomian spiritual leaders that their actions are divinely inspired (or other equally lofty rationalizations) and therefore are not open to criticism, we also need to be careful that we are not too quick to superimpose our own, perhaps more puritanical or morally rigid standards onto others. In our studies of the antinomian behavior of various mystics, it is crucial that we do not use our carefully worded arguments and finely honed logic to mask our own thin-lipped disapproval or moral distaste at behaviors that, while perhaps risky, marginal, or unorthodox, might not automatically and universally be acknowledged as ethically aberrant. A number of seemingly antinomian behaviors might be offensive or ethically problematic to many academics—for instance, mystically inspired sexual rituals between consenting adults (for instance, in certain Tantric circles), drug or alcohol use (for instance, in certain shamanic traditions), and warfare or violence for causes that could be defended as just (for instance, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*), but it is not clear that these activities should be condemned out of hand.[17]

A Natural Mysticism?

Unfortunately, there appear to be no clear-cut formulas to which we can turn in our attempts to untangle the complex, knotty relationship between mystical states of consciousness and ethics. We should be especially suspicious of seemingly simple solutions such as Zaehner's. Kripal's assessment that "Zaehner can no doubt be criticized on many fronts," is correct, but it is not only Zaehner's "inconsistent employment of psychological reductionism" that is problematic (Debating, 40).

To begin with, there are tremendous difficulties in Zaehner's stringent (and strident) attempts to separate the "natural" panenhenic experiences of merger with the universe from "divine" mystical experiences of communion with God. According to Zaehner, "natural" mystical experiences have nothing to do with ethics, since they come from contact with realities that are "inherently amoral": "Nature" and the "collective unconscious" (Debating, 36). In contrast, Zaehner

notes, "divine" mystical experiences are the result of communion with the God of Christianity, who is Love itself. Similarly, he goes on to say that "natural" experiences come without any effort or ascetic disciplines and often result in immoral behavior, whereas "divine" mystical experiences are linked to the practice of spiritual disciplines and are unattainable "until sin is eradicated" (Debating, 40).

At first glance, this seemingly neat and precise division might be appealing, but a closer examination reveals glaring difficulties. For instance, if individuals spontaneously have an experience in which they feel that they are one with the universe, Zaehner would automatically label that experience "natural." But if a phenomenologically identical experience happened to a Taoist, it would, understandably, be seen by that individual as a communion with the Tao; if a Zen Buddhist had a similar experience, he or she would doubtless describe it as a profound recognition of the Buddha nature; and so forth. While these traditions may well reject a dualistic distinction between what is "natural" and "supernatural," it is clearly the case that the Tao or the Buddha nature, understood as realities of ultimate cosmological and soteriological significance, are not "natural," at least in Zaehner's sense of the word.

Furthermore, even if a Christian had an experience of intimate communion with the natural world, it is doubtful that he or she would describe that experience as "natural." For instance, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James describes a spontaneous mystical experience of a clergyman standing on a hilltop one night when suddenly his "soul opened out, as it were, into the Infinite, and there was a rushing together of the two worlds, the inner and the outer. . . . I stood alone with Him who had made me, and all the beauty of the world. . . . The ordinary sense of things around me faded. For the moment nothing but an ineffable joy and exaltation remained."[18] This particular Christian, at least, did not think that this experience of seeing nature transfigured was "natural"—far from it. In the end, I would claim that "natural" mystical experiences are simply experiences that either happen to nonreligious individuals (and are therefore interpreted in nonreligious ways) or are experiences that do not come with the requisite qualities that Zaehner arbitrarily and dogmatically claims that a "divine" mystical experience should possess (for example, as a theist, Zaehner simply cannot accept that pantheistic experiences are valid contacts with a divine reality).[19]

Zaehner's theological criteria for assessing the ethical value of mystical experiences does not fare much better than his attempt to separate "natural" experiences from "divine" experiences. As countless conversion narratives attest, it is clearly not the case that all Christians believe that "communion with God is impossible until sin is eradicated" (Debating, 40). St. Augustine, for instance, would no doubt thank God that spontaneous mystical experiences, in Zaehner's words, "may occur to anyone, whatever his religious faith or lack of it, and what-

ever moral, immoral, or amoral life he may be leading at the time," but he would also certainly dispute Zaehner's claim that these spontaneous experiences are purely natural in origin (Debating, 35).

Manic Mysticism

Zaehner's discussion of the relationship between mysticism and ethics is not, however, completely devoid of merit. Although it is simplistic to claim that "nature mysticism inevitably weakens the will, releases unconscious libidinal forces, and loosens the moral sense, with all too predictable social results" (to use Kripal's paraphrase of Zaehner), it is not surprising to see that spontaneous mystical experiences are the ones that are often associated with immoral behavior (Debating, 39). Not because, as Zaehner thinks, these spontaneous mystical experiences are the result of the individual uniting with an amoral "natural" reality. By all accounts, there are as many antinomian theists as there are antinomian monists or atheists. Union with a God of Love does not guarantee socially impeccable behavior. Zaehner's recognition that spontaneous mystical experiences can provoke immoral behavior is better explained if we recognize that individuals who have had these unexpected mystical openings have not been engaged in the prolonged moral, psychological, and intellectual transformational work that spiritual disciplines can and do provide, and are thus not as prepared to handle these expansions of consciousness.

If the ego of a neophyte mystic is fragile or is armored with rigid defenses against powerful, yet repressed feelings of rage, sexual desire, or self-loathing, mystical experiences can dramatically upset his or her psychic equilibrium, leading, in some cases at least, not only to unjustified claims of absolute freedom from moral restraints, but also to various forms of psychopathology. I would argue that it is quite likely that not only mania (or to use current DSM IV terminology, an aspect of bipolar disorder), but also schizophrenia and paranoia might well be connected to mystical openings that, for a variety of reasons, take place within a person without the neurochemical "wiring" and/or psychological structures needed to respond adequately and effectively to this overwhelmingly powerful inrush of expanded consciousness.

While a sudden loss of ego boundaries, combined with an amplified awareness of levels of sensory and psychic information that are normally screened from consciousness, might cause a rapturous feeling of connection with the universe in one person, this same experience, if it occurs within a more psychically fragile individual, might well be powerfully disturbing and disorienting, especially if this mystical neophyte does not live within a cultural and religious context that can provide an interpretative grid and a corresponding spiritual praxis that can help to channel, contain, and transmute these influxes of spiritual energy and awareness.

Nonetheless, while Zaehner's discussion of the relationship between mysticism and mental illness deserves careful consideration, his overly simplistic depiction of the connection between mysticism and psychosis needs to be chal-

lenged. All mystics (even of the panenhenic variety) do not suffer from a "manic-like state of positive ego inflation" (Debating, 36). People are not automatically lunatics (or blasphemers) just because they experience themselves as one with God. The difference between a mystic and a psychotic is how these experiences of oneness are understood and integrated. A story often told by Ram Das, an American psychologist turned neo-Hindu mystic, makes the point well. Ram Das's brother was a psychotic committed to a mental institution. As a psychologist, Ram Das was aware of the irony: both he and his brother were convinced that they were God. The crucial difference between them, however, was that his brother was convinced that *only* he was God, whereas Ram Das believed that the God that shone in his heart was also present in the hearts of others as well.

Psychotics suffering from delusions of grandeur might have had mystical experiences of oneness with God or the universe, but these experiences are filtered through a fragile ego filled with fear and self-loathing, an ego that, in compensation, needs to be convinced of its specialness and superiority. Genuine mystics, in contrast, have worked hard to overcome the demands of their ego. Consequently, mystical experiences of expanded consciousness do not affirm their special divine status, but rather serve to reduce their isolation and connect them in ever deeper ways to others and to the world. As anyone walking on the streets of any major city knows, psychotics are frightened, angry, and isolated from others. I would say that advanced mystics are not.[20]

An Isolated Mystical Case

Monistic experiences of oneness with the universe are not, as Zaehner claims, experiences of "isolation" (Debating, 37). For an Oxford scholar holding the Spalding Chair in Eastern Religions, Zaehner demonstrates a shocking lack of understanding of Eastern religions, as is immediately demonstrated by his puzzling willingness to treat the doctrinal systems of Vedānta, Sāṁkhya, and even Mādhyamika Buddhism as if they were phenomenologically identical. The detrimental consequences of this heavy-handed conflation of very distinct traditions becomes clear when Zaehner claims that in all three traditions, the soul realizes its oneness with the Absolute, supposedly "in isolation from the world" (Debating, 37). While this claim might be true for Sāṁkhya (if we give Zaehner a lot of room for lack of metaphysical subtlety), with its inherent stress on the absolute distinction between spirit (*puruṣa*) and nature (*prakṛiti*), it simply does not apply to Advaita Vedānta, with its explicit emphasis on unity awareness—to say nothing about Mādhyamika Buddhism with its denial of the inherent truth of any understandings of selfhood. Advaita Vedānta does claim that the self in its true nature (Ātman) is identical to the Absolute (Brahman), but this doctrinal assertion is by no means based on an experience of the isolated essence of the individual self. After all, the Ātman is understood as one with everything in the universe—hardly a state of isolation.

Perhaps Zaehner is confusing the doctrinal claims of Advaita Vedānta with yogic states of consciousness (for example, *nirvikalpa samādhi*). In these completely internalized experiences of Pure Consciousness, there is no personal awareness of the outer world. During these moments of inner absorption, there is not, at least in any common-sense way, any relationship to, as Kripal puts it, "other selves, moral agents, or the world" (Debating, 39). But the doctrinal claims of Advaita Vedānta are not based as much on the trancelike states of *nirvikalpa samādhi* as they are on the "natural" or "*sahaja*" *samādhi* states of the realized mystic. In these states of consciousness, the enlightened being is said to be able to relate to others very effectively and lovingly, while at all times experiencing this dance of duality and differences as simply a manifestation of the brilliance of the one cosmic Self.

It is not at all clear why this type of unity consciousness should be understood as, in Kripal's words, "dangerously seductive" or as a "dead-end on the mystical path," unless one accepts uncritically Zaehner's ardent and dogmatic Catholic theology—a theological stance that seems to have prevented him from realizing that the Self (Ātman), which is the focus of Advaita Vedānta, is not the same as the "soul" of Christianity or the ego of psychology (Debating, 37). Semantically, the word "self" can be used to refer to the Ātman, the soul, and/or the ego. Nonetheless, these three foci of selfhood are phenomenologically very different. The unity awareness at the heart of Advaita Vedānta is not, as Zaehner puts it, a "colossal exaltation of self" nor is it "the soul's delusion that it is God" (Debating, 37). In Advaita Vedānta, the "soul" is not claiming to be one with "God," since in Advaita Vedānta there are neither separate selves/souls nor any separate God with which to become one. The self/soul assumed by Zaehner is the eternal spiritual essence of an individual, but the doctrine of the Ātman explicitly asserts that there are no eternal individual souls—rather, there is only one Self, one Consciousness, One Being that is present everywhere, both within and without. It is therefore completely inaccurate philosophically to claim, as Zaehner does, that "[a]ny mystical state which is one of undifferentiated oneness is the experience that one individual soul enjoys of its own individual self" (Debating, 40).

Zaehner's erroneous conflation of the Western individual self with the cosmic Self of Hinduism is at the root of his mistaken belief that Hindu sages were proclaiming the deification of the individual/ego when they asserted that the Ātman is one with Brahman. Unlike the mad French poet Rimbaud and the obscure manic Custance, who claimed that their egos were identical to God, the Upaniṣadic writers did not claim "self-deification" (Debating, 39). It is highly misleading to claim that Custance and Rimbaud said, according to Kripal, "more or less the same thing" as the Upaniṣadic authors (Debating, 39). It is not the Upaniṣadic sages who were "perfectly wrong," as Zaehner would have us believe, but Zaehner himself (Debating, 39). The Upaniṣadic sages were not paranoids, claiming that

they were God. The "God" they claimed to be one with is not Zaehner's divine Person; it is not the Creator and Judge of the Abrahamic faiths, but instead is Being itself, an all-pervasive, transpersonal Oneness.

Zaehner is correct to claim that mystical experiences of "undifferentiated oneness" have "nothing to do with God," if God is understood in this classically theistic manner as a separate divine Being (Debating, 40). It should be possible, however, to articulate a conception of divinity that is less restrictive. At least some Christian mystics, such as Meister Eckhart and Pseudo-Dionysius as well as many Neoplatonic Sufi thinkers, and numerous South Asian poet-saints, have cogently argued that the divine reality itself may be conceptualized as including both personal and transpersonal qualities—sophisticated arguments that Zaehner ignores. From this both/and perspective, it is quite possible for mystics to have both monistic experiences of identity with a cosmic Self and theistic experiences of being unconditionally loved by God. Maybe classical Advaita Vedānta does not say that Brahman/Ātman is loving, and to this extent Zaehner may well be correct to assert that "in monism there can be no love" (Debating, 39), but as noted above, many of the individuals acknowledged as saints in India spoke in lyrical ways of the underlying oneness of life, yet they also spoke of the profound love and compassion that can be discovered in the Absolute.

Renouncing the Sins of the Fathers

For a contemporary, early twenty-first-century reader, it can be quite disconcerting at times to read Zaehner, Danto, and even Schweitzer, as they often seem to epitomize Kripal's discussion of the colonial mentality of the West toward the East. It is easy to get the impression that these thinkers, whether explicitly or implicitly, are convinced that the unwashed masses of the East (India in particular) have no moral code, no sense of human dignity, no real understanding of right and wrong, and that it is therefore necessary and good that Western thinkers such as themselves should take on the role of benevolent, but stern, fathers and step forward to correct the errors of their foreign "children."

Danto's philosophical arrogance toward Hinduism is especially egregious. He baldly dismisses beliefs, such as *karma*, reincarnation, *mokṣa*, and *nirvāṇa*, as "fantastic" or "astonishing," and simply declares that they, as Kripal puts it, "cannot hold up to critical scrutiny" (Debating, 43). But is Danto's position really so self-evident, so irrefutable? I would suggest that his claim, for instance, that *karma* is the basis for "bad arguments" that undercut the notion of individual responsibility cannot itself "hold up to critical scrutiny" (Debating, 43). The notion of *karma* only works if you have a clear-cut understanding of individual responsibility. People who believe in *karma* believe that they are responsible, not only for the results of actions that they, as individuals, performed in this life, but also for the actions performed in previous lives as well. This hardly demonstrates a lack of individual responsibility—quite the reverse.

Danto also presents another distorted, simplistic understanding of *karma* when he claims that, because "each man gets what he deserves, there seems to be no special reason to help another" (Debating, 43). *Karma* is not as fatalistic as Danto seems to think. The essence of *karma* is free will—a person can and should freely choose to help others. In reality, someone who believes in *karma* thinks that you should help someone because it is your *karma* (and *dharma*) to do so. This person also believes that the individual to be helped has the fortunate *karma* to be helped (and that, incidentally, one's own good *karma* increases by doing so).

Admittedly, the belief in *karma* in India has been used to uphold and justify the caste system (although Buddhists, who oppose the caste system, also believe in *karma*), and the caste system goes against modern, democratic sensibilities (my own included). But the caste system is not inherently unethical. Within the Indian cultural context, one's place in the caste system is not necessarily resented nor seen as unjust. Quite the contrary. For most Hindus, it would be a tragedy to be devoid of caste, to live rootless, without a sense of place or purpose. Hindus arguably gain self-cohesion and a defined sense of identity via their immersion in the network of caste relationships and via their connection to others of various castes. Therefore, while as Westerners we might have ethical reservations about caste, it is factually not the case that Hindus are, as Danto claims, "likely to feel at one with the entire universe without necessarily feeling at one with any special portion of the universe, viz., that portion consisting of other humans" (Debating, 43). Hindus feel very much connected to other human beings, a feeling of connection that, ironically, is likely nurtured by the caste system itself.[21] It seems that, once again, Danto's seeming visceral disdain for Hindu beliefs prevents him from an accurate understanding of that tradition.

Danto's (and Zaehner's) almost palpable antagonism toward Hinduism is also evident in their one-sided presentation of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It would be possible to read Danto and Zaehner and get the impression that the primary focus of the *Gītā* is how to use mystical insight to dispassionately and inhumanely slaughter one's enemies. Danto and Zaehner present the *Gītā* as if it were historically used in a way similar to that of some Machiavellian handbook for military conquest, not as a scripture of luminous depth that has been cherished for millennia by peaceful monks, renunciates, and saints. Little, if any, acknowledgment is made of its poetry, its beauty, its profound wisdom.

Also, little patience seems to accompany any interpretation of the *Gītā* that is not strictly literal, any interpretation that views it as a philosophical and spiritual text that primarily presents complex and sophisticated guidance for those seeking an experiential union with the deepest levels of the self and reality, rather than as a "dangerous" and "chilling" text that fundamentally advocates murdering one's opponents (Debating, 44). But does a literal interpretation of the *Gītā* even make sense? How realistic is it to believe that two opposing armies patiently and politely watch and wait, while two people stand in the middle of a battlefield

and discuss philosophy? Furthermore, even if the *Gītā* is understood literally, any claim that it wholeheartedly advocates death and destruction is certainly diminished when one takes into account that the action of the *Gītā* happens within the larger context of the *Mahabhārata*'s description of a brutal, horrifying war—a war that while depicted as just, is also seen as tragic, excessive, and the beginning of the end of that civilization.

Danto's depiction of the *Gītā*'s philosophical teachings are equally problematic. For instance, Danto says that the *Gītā* teaches us "not to care" and that, like Taoism, it aims at the "stunning of the will" (Debating, 44). Actually, what is "stunning" is how simplistic and distorted Danto's reading of the *Gītā* is. "Not caring" in the *Gītā* does not mean not having compassion for others. It means not caring about the results of your actions, since you have offered these to God. The *Gītā* teaches that a person practicing karma yoga should be detached from the fruits of his or her ego, so that he or she can act in the world in a way that is not debilitated by anxiety and regret, so that he or she can be completely immersed in the task at hand, performing actions with focus and clarity for their own sake, instead of acting in a way that seeks to impress others or to glorify the self. This may well be a mode of action that has, in Schweitzer's words, renounced its "natural motives and natural meanings" (Debating, 25). But I would suggest that the world could use a good deal more of this type of renunciation.

Mystical Ethics

Renouncing the fruits of one's action is not as antiethical as Danto seems to believe. It is only a problem to ethics as it is often understood in the West, an ethics in which, in Kripal's words, "moral systems stand *against* the natural order *for* other human beings in a moral space that demands differentiation and denies identification," an ethics that assumes that "moral systems are not 'natural,' they do not attempt to unite the human being to the rest of the universe, nor do they flow from an experience of that mystical union" (Debating, 44).

This type of ethics, so strongly emphasized by Danto, as well as many of the other figures discussed in Kripal's essay, is based on a typically unexamined belief-stance: that the commonsense understanding of the self that is taken for granted in the West is accurate. This mode of ethics simply assumes that there really are numerous, distinct, autonomous individuals, who are cut off from one another, from the world that surrounds them, and from any deeper ontological grounding—discrete egos who make rational decisions about how best to interact with other atomistic and isolated individuals. But it is just this assumption that most, if not all, mystical traditions call into question. Whether these mystical traditions emphasize the reality of the Neoplatonic One; or the interpenetrating dynamic flux of Buddhist emptiness; or the Hindu cosmic Self discovered at the heart of reality; or the realization that Christ, not I, lives within; or the sacrificial dissolution of selfhood into the Truth of Allah; or the ongoing attunement with the

inner promptings of the Tao—nowhere in this sweeping panorama of mystical belief systems do we find the monadic self of Western ethics, with its clear-cut individuality and readily visible boundaries. So there should be no surprise that a tension exists between the typical Western notion of ethics, which assumes a plurality of autonomous individuals, and mystical ethics, which does not. Mysticism and ethics certainly can and do coexist—but not in the shape that much of Western philosophy and mainstream theology expects to see.

While each mystically based tradition will have its own unique ethical stance, nonetheless, examined as a whole, several overarching similarities can be found between these different traditions—certainly enough to speak of "mystical ethics" as a heuristic category. While there are doubtlessly numerous exceptions, what follows is a skeletal outline of some of the central themes and patterns that can be found in mystical ethics:

In each of these mystical traditions, mystics make conscious, concerted, and prolonged efforts to reduce the ego's claims to centrality and priority via the practice of a wide range of spiritual disciplines. In conjunction with this process of ego reduction, mystics attempt to establish a powerful, experiential, and ongoing connection to a wider, deeper level of reality, a reality that is ever present, that is discovered both deep within the consciousness of the mystic as well as hidden within the ever-shifting forms of the external world. For the mystics, this reality is the source of their highest joy and deepest fulfillment. Recognizing their oneness with this reality is seen as inherently good and as a conscious realization of the most important purpose of their lives.

Mystics, in one way or another, also seek to attune themselves, moment by moment, to this reality. The mystics learn how to become still, how to quiet the turbulence of their minds, how to listen to and trust the subtle promptings that rise up from within—as well as how to separate this deep intuitive knowledge from their ego's desire for self-gratification. The mystics seek to act from the wellsprings of their deepest truth, spontaneously and freely. They attempt to live in this world as a transparent conduit of the wisdom, compassion, and power that they discover in the depths of their mystical experience. As a result of their ongoing mystical experiences, they come to see the world transfigured and transformed into a radiant expression of that reality that shines in the depths of creation.

No one claims that mystics in various traditions are always completely successful in their prolonged and persistent quest to uncover and unfold their latent spiritual potentials. It is sad to hear of mystics who appear to have taken wrong turns, who seem to have squandered a rare and precious opportunity. Our ability to deceive ourselves and others, to distort the truth, to twist what is beautiful into a caricature of itself, is an ever-present possibility. But it is possible to learn even from the missteps and mistakes of the mystics—it can prompt us to let go of immature, naive, utopian fantasies of what "enlightenment" is

(without giving way to cynicism and bitterness); it can encourage us to see mystics not as members of an idealized separate species, but as messy, complicated, three-dimensional humans like ourselves.

Nonetheless, the glaring ethical failures of certain mystics are much less common than the simple, yet significant, successes of a multitude of anonymous mystics who have given themselves, faithfully and wholeheartedly, to this process of inner and outer transformation. It is admirable that these individuals have demonstrated the courage to follow their deepest longing, to wrestle with their inner demons, to give themselves without holding back to immensity, and to fling themselves again and again into the abyss. Their stories and teachings speak of potentials waiting to be unfolded, of possibilities otherwise never imagined. The world has been, and will continue to be, enriched by their complex, diverse, and deeply human presence among us.

Notes

1. Although Kripal and I understand the relationship between mysticism and ethics in very different ways, I appreciate the clarity and conciseness of his presentation. Therefore, because this chapter is structured as a response to Kripal's "Debating the Mystical as the Ethical" I have, for the most part, limited the scope of my comments to Kripal's portrayal of the authors in question. In addition, all parenthetical references are to pages in Kripal's two chapters (I use "Debating" for "Debating the Mystical as the Ethical" [chap. 1] and "Seeing" for "Seeing Inside and Outside the Goddess" [chap. 6]). The reader can look there for the page references to the original works of the authors referred to in the quotes.
2. For a thoughtful and provocative discussion of the apophatic implications of various nondual mystical perspectives, see Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and David Loy, *Nonduality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
3. Chapter 3 of my previous book articulates a neo-Jamesian model of this type of "both/and" metaphysical perspective. See G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).
4. A example of this paradoxical fusion of the personal and the impersonal can be found in the devotional poems of Utpaladeva (C.E. 900–950), considered to be a *siddha*, or "perfected being" of Kashmir. For instance, in one verse, Utpaladeva notes that the devotees of Śiva "are beyond duality, yet [they] retain you [Śiva] as 'the other.'" Constantina Rhodes Bailly, *Shaiva Devotional Songs of Kashmir* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 30.
5. In chapter 4 of *Exploring Unseen Worlds*, I discuss this issue in more detail. See G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).
6. Swami Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 104–5. Tantrics, whether Buddhist or Hindu, are also well known for their shocking willingness to "cross the boundaries" of social propriety in a dramatic attempt to demonstrate their realization of the underlying oneness of life. See for instance, James B. Robinson, trans., Abhyadatta, *Buddha's Lions* (Berkeley: *Dharma* Publishing, 1979); N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Tantric Religion* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1987); Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta: Firma Klm, 1976).
7. For a typical example of literature of this genre, see Brahmachari Amritatma Chaitanya, *Mata Amritanandamayi* (Kerala, India: Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust, 1988).
8. William James discusses several accounts of these types of conversion experiences. Perhaps the best known is the case of Alphonse Ratisbonne, a "freethinking French Jew" who converted to Catholicism (and eventually became a Catholic priest) due to a profound,

unexpected mystical experience of the Virgin Mary while waiting for a friend in a church. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 184–85.

9. My critiques of Bharati are not meant to imply that I find nothing of value in his work. Like Kripal, I am delighted with his humorous, frank, and self-revealing prose. I also appreciate his stress on the link between sensuous pleasure, eroticism, and mystical experience, as well as, more generally, his emphasis of the importance of the body in spiritual life. I also laughed out loud at times at his sly and devilishly on-target skewering of the "inane moralizing" of "proselytizing swamis and prudish scholars" (Debating, 47).
10. As Kripal points out, going against social injustice was exceedingly difficult to do in medieval and earlier periods (Debating, 58–59). If you challenged the king (or pope or bishop) in those times, you did so at the risk of your life. So it is not surprising that during this time period saints and mystics were not usually involved in social protest movements *either* in the East *or* the West. It is not until the rise of democracy and the focus on the individual that took place 200 to 300 years ago that we begin to see social change as a possible mystical vocation.
11. Andrew Harvey, *Hidden Journey* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), 36.
12. Ibid. For another evocative contemporary account of the transformative power of a saint's presence, this time a Sufi, see Irina Tweedie, *The Chasm of Fire* (The Old Brewery, Great Britain: Element Books, 1979).
13. Ibid., 38.
14. Recently, Harvey has publicly distanced himself from Mother Meera. See Rose Solari, "On Divine Responsibility," *Common Boundary* (Sept.–Oct. 1994), 32–39. Nonetheless, *Hidden Journey* is still a powerful testimony to the transformative effect of contact with a spiritually powerful individual.
15. It is difficult to understand how Kripal can claim here (at least obliquely) that there are no records of mystics who claim to have experienced compassion and love in the depths of their mystical awareness. The accounts of numerous mystics in the bhakti tradition, as well as the narratives of countless Western devotional mystics, are replete with descriptions of their experience of divine love and compassion. Of course, as Kripal would also doubtless point out, this love is often pictured as extremely intense and costly to the ego and self-sufficiency of the mystic—images of "burning" and "piercing" and "dissolving" abound. For instance, a female South Indian poet-saint named Mahādēviyakka writes: "What do the barren know of birthpang? Stepmothers, what do they know of loving care? How can the unwounded know the pain of the wounded? O Lord white as jasmine your love's blade stabbed and broken in my flesh, I writhe." A.K. Ramanujan, ed. and trans., *Speaking of Śiva* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), 138.
16. Michael Stoeber makes a similar point in his essay in this volume. See chapter 11.
17. I am not claiming here that anything goes. For myself, certain behaviors are clearly abhorrent and inexcusable, such as sex with children, murder, or rape.
18. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 61.
19. Zaehner's distinction between experiences that come spontaneously and those that are linked to the practice of spiritual disciplines is perhaps worth considering; however, it is not so clear that all spontaneous mystical experiences are simply apprehensions of union with "the natural world" (Debating, 36). More likely, these spontaneous experiences are catalyzed by contact with a wide variety of ontological sources (or a wide variety of different dimensions of the same source) and are then interpreted in different ways depending upon the person's cultural and psychological background. A multitude of ontological sources combined with an equally diverse number of personal interpretive lens leads to an extremely wide variety of possible mystical experiences. It is ludicrous therefore for Zaehner to claim that "any form of mystical experience from which love is absent, there can be no question of God: he is absent too" (Debating, 40). Clearly, the dark night of the soul suffered by St. John of the Cross did not feel very loving, but equally clearly he at least believed that God was very present.

20. Zaehner's comparison of the Sufi's distinction between *baṣt* and *qabḍ* and depression and mania is also deceptive (Debating, 36). "Sober" mystics like Junayd were not saying that Abu Yazid was a lunatic, but rather were criticizing him as someone who had not gone high enough in his spiritual development, someone who had not gone beyond states of "intoxication" to a state of "sobriety." In addition, these "sober" Sufis were not the final arbiters of normative Sufism. Abu Yazid (as well as the equally famous Hallaj who was brutally crucified for saying "ana'l-haqq" or "I am the Real"—understood to be "I am God") was considered a blasphemer only to some. There were also many Sufis who were ardent supporters of this sort of "intoxicated" vision and considered it to be a higher spiritual state than that of "sobriety." For a balanced discussion of these issues, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 393–409. See also Michael Sells's essay in this volume (chap. 5).
21. For detailed and sophisticated accounts of Hindu's complex social relationships, see Alan Roland, *In Search of Self in India and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

PART TWO

Some Historical Traditions

CHAPTER THREE

Beyond Good and Evil: Hypernomianism, Transmorality, and Kabbalistic Ethics

by Elliot R. Wolfson

> *And where there is no law there is no transgression.*—Romans 4:15
>
> *"We are ruled by laws," said Reb Mazol. "The laws of freedom are the strictest, along with the law of fasting." And he added: "The laws of light are inspired by the laws of the dark. What is good for one is also good for the other. We have studied the dark and the day through their common voice and conclude that opposites are one."*—Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*

Axiological Framework of Ethical Dualism and Kabbalistic Ritual

In this chapter, I explore the topic of ethics and mysticism in the history of the kabbalah from the vantage point of the relationship between antinomies that seem basic to moral discernment, on the one hand, and the transcendental oneness of mystical experience in which opposites seem to coincide, on the other. Let me preface my remarks by stating unequivocally that kabbalistic literature is clearly not monolithic in orientation, and thus one must avoid a hermeneutical monism that flattens out the conceptual landscape by ignoring the rich differences in approach that are discernible in the oral and written traditions cultivated by the masters of kabbalah. Notwithstanding this reasonable warning against an essentialist overreading, submersion in the mire of textual details has led me to the conclusion that the classical corpus of kabbalistic material yields a surprising uniformity of opinion on many of the fundamental issues pertaining to theologi-

cal, anthropological, and cosmological assumptions. One element shared by the diverse range of kabbalists is the presumed nomian framework within which the mystical impulse takes shape, and this applies as well to those kabbalists who push the law beyond its own limits based on the belief that religious observance finds its ultimate fulfillment in the act of transgression. In an effort to understand the mystical impulse to get beyond the duality of good and evil, a tendency to which I refer by the terms "hypernomian" and "transmoral," it is necessary to probe more deeply into the axiological framework of kabbalistic ritual. My working presumption is that there is a reciprocal relationship between the ethos cultivated by the kabbalists and their ontology, for the values they hold are an expression of their understanding of the nature of being just as their understanding of the nature of being is an expression of the values they hold.[1]

The nomian orientation that informed the spiritual comportment of the kabbalists is predicated on an unambiguous distinction between the permissible and the forbidden, the holy and the impure, Israel and the nations. At one level, the mystical experience of the divine promulgated in kabbalistic theosophy reinforces this dichotomous orientation, for the Godhead itself is divided into polar opposites, the left side of judgment (valenced as female) and the right side of mercy (valenced as male). The unity of God is experienced and expressed as the mediation or balance of these two sides. On this plane the normative ritualistic assumptions are operative, for just as the divine form is ontologically divided into left and right, feminine judgment and masculine mercy, the social sphere is axiologically regulated by the division into what is permissible and what is forbidden. Indeed, for any number of kabbalists, the basic division of biblical commandments according to rabbinic jurisprudence, the 248 injunctions and the 365 prohibitions, has its ontological root in the divine attributes that correspond respectively to the left side and the right side. Ritualistically, all men and women are obligated in the negative commandments and in the positive commandments that are not dependent on time, whereas only men are obligated in the positive commandments that are not dependent on time. Accordingly, in the symbolic interpretation of ritual adopted by the kabbalists, the injunctions are associated with the male and the prohibitions with the female.[2]

This portrayal of the divine, which is found already in one of the earliest medieval kabbalistic compositions, the commentary on Song of Songs by Ezra of Gerona,[3] is well expressed by the fifteenth-century kabbalist, Meir ibn Gabbai, whose words are based in great measure on a passage from Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'arei 'Orah*,[4] which was written in the last decade of the thirteenth century:

> It is known to sages of truth that the Written Torah is comprised of the right and the left, for the name of the Lord is the mystery of *Tif'eret Yisra'el*, which is in the middle comprised of right and left, and this is the reason that it comprises positive commandments and negative

> commandments. . . . The Torah is the principle of the great supernal Adam, and thus it comprises 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments like the number of limbs and sinews of the lower and the supernal Adam. An allusion to this is [found in the verse] "This is my name forever and this is my appellation [for all eternity]" (Exod. 3:15), "my name" (*shemi*) together with [the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton] *yod-he'* equals 365, "my appellation" (*zikhri*) together with [the last two letters of the Tetragrammaton] *waw-he'* equals 248.[5] Thus the unique name (*shem ha-meyuḥad*) is the principle of all the Torah, and the Torah is woven from the name YHWH, and it is verily the name. Since the Torah is the form of Adam, it is appropriate for the human (*'adam*), and through it the human is human and in the end he will be conjoined to the [divine] Adam.[6]

The mystical conception of the Torah is predicated on the identification of the latter with the Tetragrammaton, which is imaged as well in the form of an anthropos, the limbs and sinews of which consist of the 613 commandments.[7] One of the major implications of the typological classification of the positive and negative commandments is the presumption that adherence to the normative tradition provides the means by which the kabbalist (or any pious Jew with the right intention) theurgically unifies the left and the right, symbolically imaged as the masculine and feminine energies of the divine, the potency that bestows and the power that receives. The anthropomorphic shape of Torah also provides the mechanism by which the observant Jew below fully realizes his human potential, for by observing the commandments he is conjoined to the supernal anthropos, which is comprised of the letters of the name. This one textual example points to a larger point that has been somewhat obfuscated by the typological distinction between ecstatic and theurgic kabbalah in contemporary scholarship:[8] The mystical goal of conjunction and the theurgical task of reunification cannot be easily separated in the lived experience that informed the kabbalistic symbolism.

It follows that for the kabbalists the axiological framework of the law—the perspective from which one who adheres to a particular system of belief and action makes value judgments with regard to the nature of being—is grounded in the very structure of the Godhead. The extreme, and in some sense rigid, sense of duality is accentuated in those kabbalistic sources (such as the zoharic anthology and the Lurianic corpus) wherein the divine is set over and against the demonic, which is represented mythically as the struggle between the Holy One and Samael. To be sure, the latter is rooted ontically in the former, for in the final analysis kabbalists uniformly eschew an absolute metaphysical dualism.[9] Functionally speaking, however, in the interpersonal sphere of human community, demonic impurity is to be kept distinct from the realm of holiness and thus the

hedge separating Jew and non-Jew ideally should not be breached. One of the remarkable aspects of the latter Sabbatian and Frankist movements, which arose in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is precisely the fact that this hedge was significantly breached and the boundaries between Jew and other were rendered far more fluid, a fluidity that expressed itself either in terms of actual conversion or as the appropriation of external symbols and modes of discourse to articulate the internal Jewish faith. I will return to this point later on, but suffice it here to say that even these more extreme forms of crossing the boundaries do not challenge the claim I made with respect to the nomian framework and the necessary division between Jew and non-Jew. On the contrary, careful scrutiny of the ostensibly heretical messianic material indicates that the change in identity stems from the faith that the integrity of the different religions is preserved even as the boundaries separating them are traversed.

Early kabbalistic interpretations of the commandments clearly reflect this approach. No matter how emphatic a kabbalist may have been in insisting on the monistic ideal of the containment of the demonic in the divine, based ultimately on the insight concerning the absolute oneness of all things in the unity of the divine, the religious task was to keep these two domains distinct in the social realm. For example, the authorship of the *Zohar* can argue that the force of Edom derives from the same source as that of Israel—indeed the interrelatedness of the impure and the holy is underscored by the fact that Esau and Jacob were twins in the womb of Rebecca—but he did not advocate that the ultimate union of Edom and Israel be enacted by the Jewish male engaging in sexual intercourse with the Christian woman or by ingesting a ritually impure item such as pork. The metaphysical claim of the underlying unity of all being did not yet translate into the abolition of the interdictions in traditional Jewish society, which maintain the boundaries separating holiness from impurity, the people of Israel and the other nations of the civilized world.[10]

Imitatio Dei: Ontologizing the Ethical Ideal

In a previous study, I suggested that the formation of the idea of wisdom (*ḥokhmah*) in *Sefer ha-Bahir* is predicated on the moral depiction of the divine reality, which is typified by the symbolic portrayal of the patriarchs as the attributes of loving-kindness (*ḥesed*), judgment (*din*), and mercy (*raḥamim*). To know the attributes of the divine implicates one in the imitation of God's qualities, which are correlated with the moral categories.[11] Alternatively expressed, from the kabbalists' perspective gnosis and praxis are not separable, for if one does not act in a certain way as a consequence of one's insight, this is a sure sign that the insight does not stem from the inner illumination of divine light in consciousness. The pattern that I discerned in a rudimentary fashion in the bahiric composition can certainly be extended to subsequent medieval kabbalistic texts wherein the symbolic depiction of the divine attributes likewise is predicated in part on an ontologizing

of ethical virtues. The ethical task from this perspective entails a form of *imitatio Dei*, the emulation of moral traits attributed to the very nature of God.[12]

I will illustrate the point from the specific example of zoharic literature. Isaiah Tishby, arguably one of the leading scholars of the *Zohar* in the twentieth century, remarked that this work is to be characterized by a "divorce of kabbalistic mysticism from ethical doctrines."[13] If we measure the appropriateness of the term "ethical" by the criterion of universal applicability, then I would certainly agree with Tishby's assessment insofar as the conception of the anthropos in this corpus smacks of an ethnocentrism that on occasion is expressed in terms of the demonization of the other.[14] Tishby's use of the term, however, is not so restricted, and it is not on account of such a consideration that he concluded that ethics is not an integral part of the kabbalistic worldview put forth in the *Zohar*. According to Tishby, the term "ethical" denotes acts of pious devotion and moral righteousness that express the worldview that informed the ontology, cosmology, and psychology of the kabbalists. If we limit the use of the term "ethical" in this way, it can be argued, contra Tishby, that the theosophy of the *Zohar*, and that of the kabbalah more generally, is unintelligible unless one assumes a corroboration of ethics and mysticism, that is, there is an intrinsically ethical dimension to the divine potencies, which serve as the object of the kabbalist's visionary contemplation. To express the matter in a somewhat different way, the theosophical orientation propounded in zoharic literature is predicated on the assumption that the kabbalist's ability to relate to God is through imitating the divine attributes, which are valorized in terms of the rudimentary division of being into the polarities of good and evil, light and dark, right and left, Israel and the nations. The issue of morality, therefore, is not a peripheral concern in the *Zohar* or in related texts of the kabbalistic tradition influenced by the former.

The principle operative in the zoharic anthology is well expressed by the sixteenth-century kabbalist, Moses Cordovero, in his *Tomer Devorah*, a short but important treatise that portrays in the most spirited way the synthesis of theosophical doctrine and ethical pietism.[15] The first chapter of the composition begins with the following proclamation: "A person must make himself similar to his Creator and then he will be in the mystery of the supernal form (*ha-ṣurah ha-'elyonah*), the image and the likeness. If he imitates [the divine] in his body and not in his actions, he falsifies the form . . . for the essence of the supernal image and likeness is his actions, and what good will it do him to be like the supernal form in the likeness of the structure of his limbs, but not like the Creator in his actions?"[16] In the remainder of the treatise, Cordovero presents a systematic delineation of the moral and religious actions that correspond to each of the ten sefirotic gradations, which make up the fullness of the divine vacuity. According to Cordovero, the *sefirot* are configured and aligned with the human person in the following pattern that reflects a descending order: Intellect, will, thought, speech, action, and the powers of the body. By performing the actions that correspond to

the appropriate potencies, therefore, one imitates the actions of the imaginal body of God and is bound thereby to the supernal holiness. In order to occasion this state of mystical conjunction, which is presented by Cordovero as the telos of the pious path, the person must know which of the divine gradations rules at a particular time so that he may be bound to it in order to accomplish the particular rectification (*tiqqun*). He who conducts himself in this manner lives in a state of ecstatic union with the divine Presence, which is portrayed more specifically in terms of the image of his head being crowned by the light/breath of the *Shekhinah*.[17] The act of imitating God's attributes, the way that facilitates the mystical state of communion, is connected, moreover, to the theurgical task of influencing the sefirotic emanations.

The accordance of the mystical and the theurgical elements is made clear in the opening comment of the first draft of *Tomer Devorah*, which has recently been published from manuscript: "Concerning the action of man and his advantage with respect to the light or the emanation of the supernal beings: He shakes the supernal worlds, and he is a chariot for the *sefirot*."[18] The image of shaking the worlds above indicates the theurgical capacity of the individual to influence the divine, whereas the image of man being a chariot for the emanations signifies the mystical bond that connects human and divine. Cordovero's remark points to a fundamental insight in the kabbalistic tradition that has been largely missed by scholars who debate the issue of the primacy of magic over mysticism or that of mysticism over magic.[19] In the religious philosophy of the kabbalists, the two are inseparable, as Cordovero clearly indicates. To express the matter in somewhat different terms: The way up and the way down are one and the same, for the mystical ascent to the divine results in the magical drawing down of that very energy.[20]

Transmorality, Hypernomianism, and the Suspension of the Ethical

The use of the term "ethical" may be employed to characterize the ontological pattern applied to the luminous potencies of the divine insofar as this pattern is based on a fissure of the divine energy into polar opposites. According to the arresting image of one zoharic passage, the scales of deception and the scales of truth together make up the balance of justice.[21] Beyond this division, however, the kabbalistic symbolism brings one to a point of unity wherein the thing becomes its opposite. If God is truly one, what other side is there? In the undifferentiated singularity of the ultimate being, left must be right, right left, Esau Jacob, and Jacob Esau. Is there not an aspect of the mystical experience whose monistic potentiality defies the dualistic nature necessitated by ethical systems? Would the convergence of mysticism and morality not necessitate an inversion of values that lifts one beyond the simplistic dichotomy of good and evil, permissible and forbidden, a state wherein deception and truth are one and the same? Indeed, like

other forms of mysticism, in the texts of the kabbalists, we can find descriptions of the Infinite, or even of the first of the emanations, *Keter*, the crown, which is generally identified as the will, in language that is nondual and thus attempts to transcend the conventional epistemological categories of everyday experience. Frequently in kabbalistic texts the unity of God is described by the expression *'aḥdut ha-shaweh*, the "equanimous one," which conveys the idea that the oneness of the divine comprehends everything in a simple and indivisible unity. The characteristic of equanimity (*hishtawwut*) signifies the convergence of opposites in a perfect synthesis.[22] Typical of this approach is the description of the first of the ten emanations offered by the fifteenth-century kabbalist Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov, which is based on material that can be dated to the thirteenth century:[23] "They called it the concealed light (*ha-'or ha-mit'alem*) that receives every kind of change and permutation like a mirror that has no form and in which all forms are seen. It is the secret of all the opposites, and Moses our master, may peace be upon him, attempted to contemplate it but he was not given permission at all."[24] The depiction of the primal source as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, which appears in any number of kabbalistic sources, is expressed poignantly in a passage from the *Zohar* in the following way:

> R. Isaac said: When the Holy One, blessed be he, created the world and wanted to reveal the depth out of the hiddenness,[25] and the light from within the darkness, they were contained within one another. . . . And all things were contained one within the other, the good inclination and the evil inclination, right and left, Israel and the nations, white and black. All things were dependent on one another.[26]

Here we have clearly traversed the realm of being wherein the polarity conducive to the standard moral judgment is operative. The moment in the divine economy described by R. Isaac is one in which the normal dichotomies that regulate the kabbalist's demeanor, the moral distinction between good and evil, the spatial distinction between right and left, the ethnoreligious distinction between Israel and the nations, and the perceptual distinction between white and black, all dissolve in the experience of the oneness of the Infinite. The transcendence of the dyadic in the One that has not yet become one, for in becoming one it would be two, poses a major challenge to moral thinking based on the clear and distinct separation of opposites. The very ground for the kabbalist's ethical and religious position in the world would seem to be undermined by the insight that in the Infinite good and evil are one and the same.

To be sure, on many occasions in the *Zohar* and related kabbalistic texts, the ethical ideal is presented as the containment of the left in the right, the restoration of the demonic to the divine, which signifies the true unity of God.[27] But the point of the aforementioned passage is not simply that the righteous person is

one who contains the left in the right. Ultimately, there is no distinction between left and right, for what is judged from the more limited perspective as polar opposites must be seen as identical from the perspective of the Infinite. Consider, by contrast, another passage from the *Zohar*, which affirms the axiological framework that reinforces the duality within the divine: "The Torah is the power of the right . . . and the left is contained in the right. He who makes the right left or the left right it is as if he destroyed the world."[28] Turning the left into the right or the right into the left is here portrayed as a world-destroying act, for the very notion of worldhood is dependent on the stabilization of opposites, which is expressed in the technical terminology of the containment of the left in the right. To cross that boundary by making something into its opposite is an act of transgression with the potentially lethal consequence of demolishing the world. The contrast of this passage with the aforementioned comment attributed to R. Isaac is so obvious that it does not demand a lengthy explanation. Simply put, the traversing of boundaries laid out in the second passage as destructive to the structure of being is precisely what is implied in R. Isaac's description of the divine prior to the generation of the world. To avoid potential misunderstanding let me reiterate that the two passages present a contrast but not a contradiction, for the former relates to the condition of being prior to the splintering of the divine in the process of creation (or, to be more precise, emanation), whereas the latter describes the situation after the world of particularity and differentiation has been constructed. Still, the former passage is instructive in helping one establish what the epistemological limits are with respect to the mystical experience of the oneness of the divine within the ontological parameters that inform the lifeworld of the kabbalists. Pushing at the margin may provide the best demarcation of the center.

The radicalness of the zoharic position is perhaps most evident from the claim that when God wanted to reveal the depth of concealment there was no distinction between Israel and the nations. Such a viewpoint cannot possibly be applied pragmatically without disrupting the whole system of values that has informed the deportment of the kabbalists through the generations. In spite of the obvious dilemma that this insight poses to the nomian framework of Jewish ritual, kabbalists could not resist articulating this feature of the experience of God. Consider, for example, the astonishing remark made by the thirteenth-century Catalan kabbalist, Azriel of Gerona, in response to the hypothetical philosophical query regarding the possibility of God creating something out of nothing: "The One who brings forth something out of nothing is not depleted, for the something is in the nothing in the manner of the nothing, and the nothing is in the something in the manner of something. . . . The Creator is the principle of identity for every way of faith and way of heresy, for they are identical in the place of the conjunction of his nothing in his something."[29] That God should be identified as the root of faith and the root of heresy is not shocking—indeed in a

strictly monotheistic system how could it be otherwise?—but what is so provocative about Azriel's statement is the assertion that in the Creator the way of faith and the way of heresy are equal. Clearly this presents a fundamental challenge to the normative assumptions that color the kabbalist's worldview. The presumed grounding of values in the structure of reality is rendered problematic by the mystical insight that in the highest stage of being there is no distinction between good and evil, faith and heresy. If good is evil and faith heresy, on what basis can one condemn or condone a particular action or belief? The strictures of moralism and nomianism would seem to dissolve for the mystic who experiences the coincidence of opposites in the Godhead even if we must recognize that at the lower level these strictures are preserved. From my perspective it is not feasible to resolve this issue by resorting to two forms of experience corresponding to two ontological levels. The question is how does the experience of the identity of opposites impact the kabbalist in an effort to find an ultimate ground for the ethical values prescribed by the nomian assumptions of the tradition? How does the ethos pragmatically reflect the worldview informed by the assumption that good is evil and evil good?

It is of interest to consider in light of this discussion the following remark of Meir ibn Gabbai, which recognizes the breakdown of polar logic in describing the state of affairs in the supreme regions of the Godhead, but which nevertheless attempts to preserve the axiological framework that is basic to the nomian perspective of the halakhah, which would be reflected ontologically in the emanation of the lower sefirotic emanations wherein the opposites that are joined together are separated into divergent attributes and are spatially aligned on opposing sides:

> It is said that the foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know and to comprehend that "the Lord is God and there is none apart from him" (Deut. 4:35). To understand this principle one must know that prior to the disclosure of the supernal glory, the secret of the Lord God (*yhwh 'elohim*), all of the entities were concealed and unified in the hidden thought, and all of the paths, the letters, the utterances, together with the souls, potencies, light and dark, good and evil, and all of the opposites were mixed there like the silver and the dross that are mixed together. Everything was from one source whence there came forth all of the opposites, for even though good and evil are opposite things, in the will of the soul they were mixed. When the will was clarified it was seen that the good is the essence of the will, and the evil is only for the sake of the perfection of the good, to fortify and to establish it. It follows that everything is hewn from one source, for there is no discernment in the glory regarding the entities existing in this manner [of opposites]. The hidden and simple will came to construct a

> palace for his glory and the mother of the children emanated with all of these entities comprised within her, and she is the secret of the supernal Egypt (*miṣrayim*), for in her all of the opposites are mingled (*miṣranim*) and mixed (*me'uravim*) together, and from there each one is fixed in the place that is appropriate for it, the light and the good in their place and the dark and evil in their place, and the holy and pure souls separated from the impure souls. Thought emanated and was purified, and it became known that the good is its essence. The paths and the letters separated and were known in themselves, and the truth, which was concealed, hidden, and mixed with deceit, separated, and it was revealed and became manifest. This is from the master of truth, blessed be he, the great strength and the mighty hand, and through this salvation and freedom is given to all things. It is known in truth that "the Lord is God and there is none apart from him."[30]

Another way to express the breakdown of the dual structure of the divine relates specifically to the characterization of the first of the emanations as pure mercy. In some of the more recondite parts of zoharic literature, the *'Idra' Rabba'* ("Great Assembly") and *'Idra' Zuṭa'* ("Small Assembly"), two narrative sections in which the master of the circle, R. Simeon ben Yoḥai, discloses secrets about the divine in an augmented and intensified anthropomorphic manner, this theological idea is expressed in the bold mythical symbols of the head that is entirely white, which is symbolic of divine compassion,[31] or the beard of the Ancient of Days composed of thirteen curls, which correspond to the traditional rabbinic idea of the thirteen attributes of mercy.[32] Insofar as this divine gradation is characterized as pure unmitigated mercy, there can be no evil over and against the good, no darkness over and against the light. Interestingly, the preamble to the major textual accretion of this literary genre, the *'Idra' Rabba'*, which consists of the dramatic entry of the members of the fraternity into the meeting place where they will hermeneutically thrash out the secrets disclosed by Simeon ben Yoḥai, reflects in particular the struggle in the mind of the master whether or not he should reveal these esoteric matters. The ambivalence is epitomized in the utterance placed in the mouth of Simeon ben Yoḥai, "Woe if I reveal, and woe if I do not reveal."[33] It has been pointed out that the reluctance on the part of R. Simeon to disclose the secrets relates in this context to the potential antinomianism of the content of what was to be revealed.[34] The point is strengthened by the citation of the verse "It is time to act for the Lord, for they have violated your Torah" (Ps. 119:126) in the continuation of the aforementioned passage,[35] a verse that is interpreted as a proof text for the possibility of anchoring the suspension of the law in the law itself already in classical rabbinic sources.[36] The interpretation of this verse in the zoharic text is as follows:

> R. Simeon began [to expound] "It is time to act for the Lord." Why is it "time to act for the Lord?" Because "they have violated your Torah." What is [the meaning of] "they have violated your Torah?" The Torah above, which is destroyed if the rectification of this name is not performed. This is said with respect to the Ancient of Days. It is written, "How fortunate are you, Israel, who is like you?" (Deut. 33:29), and it is written, "Who is like you, O Lord, among the celestials?" (Exod. 15:11).[37]

The urgency of the moment is marked by the need to reveal the hidden secrets. This is linked to the fact that the supernal Torah, which is identical with the sixth emanation or *Tif'eret*, is violated to the degree that its mystical essence as the Tetragrammaton and, by extension, its divine status (indicated as well by the final two verses that are cited in the passage) are not apprehended. This attribute is related, moreover, to the first of the emanations, the Ancient of Days (*'Atiq Yomin*), an idea that is derived exegetically from the possessive form of the word *toratekha*, "your Torah," that is, the Torah (*Tif'eret*) that belongs to the Ancient of Days. The rectification of this situation is secured by the dissemination of the esoteric teaching distinctive to this section of zoharic literature, for it deals primarily with the Torah of *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* (the "holy ancient One"), another name for *'Atiq Yomin*, in contrast to the Torah of *Ze'eir 'Anpin* (the "small-faced" or "impatient One"). The former is the revelation that stems from and is descriptive of the highest configuration of the manifestation of the divine concealment, whereas the latter is the revelation that stems from and is descriptive of the lower configuration. The Torah of *Ze'eir 'Anpin* corresponds to what was revealed at Sinai, whereas the Torah of *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* will be fully disclosed only in the messianic age. Just as *Ze'eir 'Anpin* comprises within itself judgment and mercy, the left side and the right side, the Sinaitic Torah is composed of laws divided into what is permissible and what is prohibited, an axiological division that is reflective of the ontological dichotomy between the realm of holiness and that of impurity. Presumably, inasmuch as the messianic Torah is correlated with the first of the divine gradations that transcends all duality, it is beyond the distinction of sacred and profane, sanctioned and forbidden.[38] This Torah, in contrast to what was revealed at Sinai, is constituted by pure mercy without any admixture of judgment, and thus it surpasses the dichotomies that are necessary for the nomian and moralistic perspectives. That is to say, in the nondifferentiated unity appropriate to the first of the emanations, there is no basis to distinguish either between holy and impure or between right and wrong. The superiority of the messianic Torah to the Sinaitic Torah is alluded to as well in the words of R. Simeon: "It says, 'O Lord, I have heard your teaching, and I am awed' (Hab. 3:2). There it was appropriate to be afraid, but with respect to us the matter depends on love, as it is written, 'You shall love the Lord, your God' (Deut. 6:5), and it is written, 'but

it was because of the love of the Lord for you' (ibid. 7:8), and it is written, 'I have loved you [said the Lord]' (Mal. 1:2)." In the revelation at Sinai, which is described by Habakkuk, fear was the appropriate image, for it comprised both judgment and mercy, but the messianic revelation, which consists solely of mercy, is dependent only on love. The unifying force of love is such that this Torah cannot promote the polarity of holy and impure that is basic to the ritualistic framework of rabbinic Judaism.[39]

The resemblance of the language of the zoharic text with respect to love as the binding force and the instruction of Jesus to his disciples regarding the need to love one another (John 13:34–35) has been duly noted.[40] I would argue, following a similar path, that the zoharic text is here reversing the standard medieval Christian portrayal of Judaism as a religion of fear, law, and discipline, in contrast to Christianity, which is based on love and compassion. The polemical strategy employed by the zoharic author is to appropriate what has been attributed to Christianity and to present it as the esoteric truth of Judaism. Hence, the Torah to be fully disclosed in the messianic era, in contrast to Sinaitic Torah, is based purely on love. I would suggest, moreover, that the Christological aspect is enhanced by the fact that this new Torah transcends the duality necessary to preserve the status quo of the nomian perspective articulated in the traditional rabbinic literature.

Support for my interpretation may be elicited from another passage from this unit. The unqualified manifestation of pure mercy, which is associated theosophically with *'Atiqa' de-'Atiqin*, the "Ancient of Ancients," is deferred to the messianic future,[41] whereas the current historical epoch is said to be ruled by the mercy of *Ze'ir 'Anpin* since it comprises an element of judgment and thereby maintains the polarity of opposites.

> It has been taught: It is written, "The eyes of the Lord your God are upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Deut. 11:12). Now it is the case that "the eyes of the Lord your God are upon it," for there is an opening of the eyes for good and for evil, since there is within him a right and a left, judgment and mercy. In the time to come, there will be found in him one eye of mercy, the eye of *'Atiqa' de-'Atiqin*, as it is written, "with great mercy I will gather you" (Isa. 54:7). Inasmuch as it mentions "mercy" (*raḥamim*), why does it say "great" (*gedolim*)? There is, however, mercy and there is mercy, the mercy of *'Atiqa' de-'Atiqin*, which is called the "great mercy" (*raḥamim gedolim*), and the mercy of *Ze'eir 'Anpin*, which is called simply mercy (*raḥamim setam*).[42]

The position of one eye would seem to fly in the face of correlative logic rooted in bipolar consciousness.[43] We might suppose that one can speak mean-

ingfully of mercy only if there is the opposing quality of judgment just as one can only speak of the right side if there is the opposing left side. The zoharic application of the image of the one eye to the highest manifestation of the Godhead, to be realized fully in the messianic future, challenges that correlative logic, which is exhibited in the Aristotelian principles of noncontradiction and the excluded middle. This point, which I consider to be a fundamental ontological principle that informed kabbalistic hermeneutics in general but that is keenly expressed in the mythical language of the Idrot sections of zoharic literature, is well captured in the remark of Cordovero:

> The secret of the eyes, their vision, and their providence depends on the change of qualities, that is, the colors of the eye, but in *Keter* there is no judgment so that there might be in it a court balanced (*beit din shaqul*)[44] in its aspects, for it is entirely merciful and white. Even so there is contained within it many types of mercy. . . . With respect to the secret of the ruling below in *Ze'eir 'Anpin*, there is right and left, and thus there are two eyes, the right eye and the left eye. But *Keter* is entirely right . . . and just as below there are two eyes with respect to the judgment in the right and in the left, above they become one on account of the unity. Thus, in every place that the one eye is mentioned, it is about this aspect of *Keter*, which is the open eye. . . . Therefore, there is one eye, and below there are multiple eyes, and every place that mentions "eyes" instructs about the providence of *Ze'eir 'Anpin*. . . . Thus, the *sefirot* below contain judgment, but above they are mercy; below they have both right and left, but above they are one, entirely right. This matter relates to the mystery that all the *sefirot* are unified in the root of the unity, and their emanation causes their differentiation. . . . Therefore, when the *sefirot* ascend to *Keter*, they do not indicate right and left and differentiation, but rather everything is right and one unity. Thus from the right comes forth the left. . . . Therefore, when all the entities return to the single point in their root, all of them will be contained in mercy, for there is no left there since it has not yet emanated, and everything is right in one reality. This is the principle for all existents: In their source in *Keter*, all of them are right in one aspect.[45]

While the aforementioned passages do not explicitly relate to the gender implications of the imagery of the eye, they are nonetheless clear. Given the standard kabbalistic association of mercy with the masculine and judgment with the feminine, the implication of the messianic picture is that everything will be transformed into the masculine. Contrary to what we might think, however, in this state we can continue to speak of the masculine gender even though there is no

feminine counterpart. Indeed, the female has been restored to the male. Cordovero has expressed the theosophical notion with an allusion to an idea articulated in some rabbinic texts: Above there is no left, which does not signify, as some contemporary interpreters might be tempted to suggest, that the rabbinic authors of this claim were denying the use of anthropomorphic imagery to depict the divine realm, for if that were the case then the right would also not be attributed to God.[46] On the contrary, the intent of the rabbinic dictum is to emphasize that with respect to God there is only the right and no corresponding left.[47] Logically, one might insist that if there is a right there must be a left since the meaningfulness of these terms lies in their correlative nature, the one set against the other.[48] But the force of the rabbinic notion is to get beyond such correlation. Opposite attributes are not antinomical essences but complementary aspects of one reality.[49] Hence, in the supernal world, there is only right with no opposing left since the left is comprised within the right. Naturally, it is possible to speak of the containment of the right in the left as well, and indeed such a formulation is utilized by kabbalists in describing a lower realm of being. In the uppermost gradation, however, it is necessary to contemplate the exclusive containment of the left in the right. This is applied by the kabbalists to the construction of gender as well: The unity of the divine others itself in the formation of the seemingly autonomous feminine counterpart to the masculine. The symbolic application of the image of copulation to the divine potencies is meant to convey the idea that the rupture in God is repaired by means of restoring the other to the self, the feminine left to the masculine right, the sweetening of judgment in mercy. In the highest aspect of the Godhead, this is precisely the ontological condition. The implication of the zoharic text is made explicit in the following passage from Ḥayyim Vital:

> [The highest aspect of the soul] *yeḥidah* is from *'Arikh 'Anpin*, and it is called *yeḥidah*, for from *'Arikh* and below there is a female, but in *'Arikh 'Anpin* there is no female but only male (*'ein bo neqevah ki 'im dekhura'*), and the reason is that from *'Imma'* and below there are judgments, and thus there is there a female for the female is the aspect of judgments. . . . Concerning him Scripture says, "Behold the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him" (Ps. 33:18). The explanation is that there are two eyes below, right and left, but he is mercy within mercy, and thus he is called "eye," for there is but one eye. Hence, it is called *yeḥidah*, for no female is there but only male (*ki 'ein sham neqevah ki 'im zakhar*), [and thus it] is called singular (*yaḥid*).[50]

Note the formulation that in the highest configuration of the divine there is no female but only male.[51] From this perspective one can refer intelligently to

maleness even in the absence of femininity, and hence it is perfectly acceptable to utilize the image of the single eye to depict the highest aspect of the Godhead; we do not need to posit a second eye to speak meaningfully of the single eye. The aspect of the soul correlated with this element of the divine is called *yeḥidah*, which connotes singularity, for there is no other in relation to it since it comprises everything in the unity of itself. As the matter is expressed elsewhere by Vital: "The great encompassing [light], which is *yeḥidah* and which is in the aspect of *'Arikh 'Anpin* . . . encompasses everything equally, and to all of them it imparts the light of the aspect of the soul (*neshamah*). Therefore, it is called *yeḥidah*, for it has only one aspect in one equanimity."[52] This idea is reiterated in slightly more detailed language in a description of the light of *'Ein Sof* given by Vital in a discourse on the world of emanation:

> Know that with respect to this light above *Keter*, even though there is some judgment, it is nonetheless so ameliorated that it is not considered as judgment at all. When it enters *Keter*, which is already a vessel, it is considered as judgment. All is one configuration (*parṣuf*) insofar as the vessel is pure and refined. Therefore, there is in it no feminine as there is below in the case of *'Abba'* and *'Imma'*, *Ze'eir* and *Nuqba'*. Rather all is contained in one configuration (*ha-kol kalul be-farṣuf 'eḥad*) concerning which it says "the eye of God" (Ps. 33:18). There are not two eyes, that is, *ḥesed* and *din*, for all is one.[53]

It is possible, indeed mandatory, to think of the highest configuration of God as the single eye, which is completely masculine in nature, the eye of pure mercy in which the attribute of judgment is entirely ameliorated. The point is well expressed by the seventh-century Ashkenazi kabbalist, Naftali Bachrach, who notes that the anthropomorphic application of the eye to God signifies divine providence. A difference exists, however, between the character of providential care assigned respectively to higher and lower configurations of the Godhead, which is reflected in the textual shift from the use of two eyes to describe God (Deut. 11:12) to the use of one eye (Ps. 33:18). In the lower divine countenance, *Ze'eir 'Anpin*, the ten essences (*hawwayot*) are divided into two groups of five, which correspond to the left eye of strength and the right eye of grace. By contrast, in the upper countenance, *'Arikh 'Anpin*, there is only one eye, which comprises all ten potencies since the forces of strength are sweetened in and bound to the forces of mercy. Regarding this state, one can apply the scriptural reference, "The one of a good eye[54] is blessed" (Prov. 22:9).[55] The logic of the kabbalistic symbolism thus affords us the possibility to speak in a meaningful way about the right without a corresponding left, a male that has no distinct female counterpart.[56] In the most primordial aspect of the divine, which some kabbalists believed

would have full reign of power in the messianic era when all things were to be restored to the Godhead, the logic of correlation gives way to a textual reasoning that defies the necessity to posit a female that is ontologically distinct from the male. The eschatological overcoming of gender dimorphism bespeaks as well the overturning of the axiological framework that makes possible the concurrence of the ethical and the mystical in the theosophic symbolism of the kabbalists.

A particularly interesting description of this phenomenon is given by Gikatilla who thus described the first of the ten emanations of the divine, *Keter*, identified further as the divine will (*raṣon*) or that which is nothing (*'ayin*): "This is the world of complete grace and mercy, for he atones for every sin and for every iniquity, even though of this no human beings are worthy."[57] The first emanation, which for Gikatilla is identical with Ein-Sof, is portrayed as the quality of grace that is not commensurate to what human beings justly deserve. On the contrary, this property of divine love is predicated on the unworthiness of the recipient, for if the recipient were worthy, the love that would be appropriate would be the lower manifestation in which there is an admixture of judgment, the sixth emanation, compassion (*raḥamim*) that is connected with justice (*mishpaṭ*).[58] The love that is linked to *Keter*, by contrast, is beyond justice; it is the world of pure mercy, to which Gikatilla (in line with the zoharic symbolism) refers by the startling symbol of the white head (*ro'sh lavan*).[59] For Gikatilla, the ontological dualism and gender polarity that characterizes the sefirotic emanations, right and left, front and back, masculine and feminine, the power to overflow and the desire to receive, begin from *Ḥokhmah*, the second *sefirah* that is considered to be the first emanation since *Keter* is eternal.[60]

> We have already explained that from *Keter* and below there is no simple attribute (*middah peshuṭah*) that is not mixed with its counterpart, for the emanation of *Ḥokhmah*, which derives from *Keter*, necessitates all opposites, all of the mixtures, and all of the way of emanation and the bond of the chariots. For *Ḥokhmah* is adjacent to *Keter* and *Binah*, and since it is placed between these two emanations it has a front and back, the front turned toward *Keter* and the back toward *Binah*. And since it has a front and back, it is the cause of all opposites, differences, and mixtures in the world, and from here is generated every front and back, white and black, right and left, above and below. This is one of the deep secrets in the bonds of the chariot and the emanations of the essences. The one who comprehends this secret will understand all of the chariots and all of the levels of emanation, for they are in the form of that which receives and that which overflows, and this is the secret of the androgyne.[61]

Ostensibly, it would appear that the simplicity of *Keter*, which stands in contrast to the composite nature of *Ḥokhmah* and all subsequent emanations in the sefirotic pleroma, places it above all forms of polarity. Accordingly, it would not be appropriate to depict *Keter* by any gender; the infinite and simple will is neither male nor female. However, a more attentive reading of Gikatilla's theosophic symbolism suggests that even this will is characterized in terms that are gendered as masculine. Thus, the supernal gradation, as Gikatilla puts it in another passage, is the "attribute of complete mercy (*raḥamim gemurim*), and it is called *'Ehyeh*, the elder (*zaqen*), and it pities without any admixture of judgment."[62] The theosophic intent of the title *zaqen*, the elder, is related to the function of *Keter* as the quality that ameliorates all lower expressions of judgment. Divine judgment thus rises to the attribute of pure mercy, which is first, and thus the oldest, but also the last, which is the youngest. The one that was (conveyed by the designation *zaqen*) is the one that shall be (implied in the name *'ehyeh*).[63] Brilliantly, Gikatilla links this process exegetically to the biblical account of Isaac's eyesight dimming when he turned old, *wayehi ki zaqen yiṣḥaq watikhhena 'enaw mere'ot* (Gen. 27:1): The dimming of the eyes of Isaac symbolically conveys the diminution of the attribute of judgment when it rises to and merges with the complete and pure mercy.[64] A cryptic allusion is made here as well to an anthropomorphic motif developed more fully in the Idrot sections of zoharic literature: The infinite power of God, the world of unalloyed mercy, is expressed in the thirteen attributes of mercy, the thirteen supernal springs of divine overflow, which can also be portrayed as the thirteen curls of the beard of the holy ancient One. The verbal hint to this arcane myth lies in the fact that the word *zaqen* can also be vocalized as *zaqan*, the "beard." A fuller disclosure is offered in another passage where the specific focus is on the word *zaqan*:

> We must also alert you to the great secret, and this is the secret of the supernal embellishments (*ha-tiqqunim ha-'elyonim*) that are called the "beard" (*zaqan*), and they are the secret of *Tif'eret*. This matter is a great secret from the secrets of the chariot (*sodot ha-merkavah*). . . . The one who knows the secret of the hairs of the beard (*se'arot ha-zaqan*) knows the secret of *Tif'eret*, and from this secret are born all the parts of the chariot (*pirqei ha-merkavah*), for they spread forth from *Tif'eret* to here and to there. This secret is hidden and sealed in what is said by Scripture, "It is the splendor of a man (*tif'eret 'adam*) to dwell in a house" (Isa. 44:13). And this is the secret of what Solomon said, "His splendor (*tif'arto*) passes over the transgression" (Prov. 19:11). And this is the secret regarding the fact that the blessed and exalted One forever is glorified in his creatures after they sin since they return in repentance, and this is sufficient to the one who comprehends.[65]

In a commentary on the ten *sefirot* preserved anonymously, but which was apparently composed by Gikatilla,[66] the matter is expressed in the following manner:

> The secret of *Keter* is the secret of the primordial existence . . . and it is called Ein-Sof, and it has no boundary, no beginning, middle or end . . . and this is called the world of mercy . . . and this is the source whence emerge the thirteen attributes of mercy, and in this place there is no change at all, but it is entirely pure mercy, and it exists perpetually in oneness. . . . Thus from this *sefirah* come forth thirteen springs of mercy, and there is no judgment at all, but rather they are entirely pure mercy.[67]

In the infinite will of God, therefore, every act of judgment is transformed into mercy since in that gradation the divine unity is expressed as pure mercy without any admixture of judgment. But if that is the case, then we must presume a suspension of the ethical, for the standard by means of which we distinguish between the one who acts morally and the other who does not is problematized by the fact that in this world of complete mercy there is no room for any opposites. An allusion to this suspension of the nomian is found in the description of *Keter* as the "supernal fortune (*mazzal ha-'elyon*) in the secret of the thirteen attributes of mercy that are fixed in *Keter*, for children, livelihood, and sustenance are dependent on that very fortune,[68] and even the Torah scroll is dependent on it, and this is what the rabbis, blessed be their memory said,[69] 'Everything depends on fate even the Torah scroll in the ark.'"[70] Gikatilla is quick to warn the reader not to think that this dictum implies that the Torah is dependent on the astral constellations (*mazzalot*), for since God created the world in its entirety by means of the Torah it would make no sense to speak of the Torah being dependent on a heavenly body. What, then, does it mean to say that everything is dependent on *mazzal* including the Torah scroll? The esoteric import of the pronouncement is that the word *mazzal* refers to the "supernal fortune that is known in *Keter*, for all the *sefirot* and all created entities are dependent on it, and even the Torah is dependent on it. It is called *mazzal* because from it issue forth (*nozlim*) the powers in all the *sefirot* and in all human beings, and the Torah scroll also draws power from this fortune and it receives from it."[71]

Gikatilla has provided the symbolic interpretation of the saying, which precludes an astrological reduction of Torah to the fate of the heavens. One is hardly surprised, for such an understanding would smack of idolatry in the classical rabbinic understanding. But what does the statement that even the Torah scroll is dependent on *mazzal* really mean? The *mazzal* refers to the aspect of *Keter* whence all beings in the divine and mundane realms emanate. It is thus the ultimate ontological source, the spring of effluence that gushes forth in unabated benefi-

cence to sustain the existence of all levels of being. Thus, to say that the Torah itself is dependent on *mazzal* is to suggest that this attribute of God transcends the duality that characterizes the attribute to which Torah corresponds, namely, the gradation of *Tif'eret*, which is a balance between judgment and mercy, left and right. The supernal fortune is pure compassion, the quality of love that has the capacity to erase the stain of guilt completely since it exceeds the dichotomy of right and wrong. One is here reminded of Nietzsche's remark, which deeply echoes the Pauline perspective on grace and deeds, "Whatever is done from love occurs beyond good and evil."[72] From the vantage point of the theosophic symbolism embraced by Gikatilla, the act of divine love exceeds the dualism of good and evil, which is expressed architecturally as the division of the divine form into right and left. The true significance of the assertion that even the Torah scroll is dependent on *mazzal* is that the law itself derives from the aspect of God that surmounts the nomian framework of permissible and forbidden. Gikatilla's position is in line with the view expressed in the *'Idrot*, as discussed above, concerning the distinction between the present Torah made up of the duality of good and evil, on the one hand, and the messianic Torah that is pure love, on the other. As in these sections of zoharic literature, so in Gikatilla, Torah derives from a higher source that is connected with the uppermost manifestation of the divine. Interestingly, the statement that "everything depends on fortune even the Torah scroll in the ark" appears in Hebrew in the *'Idra' Raba'* with an intent that is identical to Gikatilla.[73]

In some measure, the kabbalistic orientation is anticipated in the rabbinic attribution of the concept of *lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*, which conveys the act of going beyond the strict letter of the law, to God.[74] In one talmudic context, the possibility of God acting in this manner, which entails as well the suspension of the ethical standard decreed by the law, is presented as the very substance of divine prayer.[75] In a second context, a contrast is drawn between Torah, in which truth is written, and judgment (*din*), in which no truth is written; only with respect to the latter is it said that God acts beyond the measure of the law.[76] As in many issues, so in this particular case, a kabbalistic author expands and elaborates the fragmented aggadic tradition of the rabbis. The implicit idea that God's mercy may exceed the demands of the law is ontologized by the kabbalistic depiction of the first of the hypostatic emanations that transcends the binary polarity expressed as the separation into right and left. This place is reached not by dutiful compliance to law but through prayer that wells spontaneously from the depth of human suffering, as we find in the description of Hannah, "In her wretchedness, she prayed over the Lord, weeping all the while" (1 Sam. 1:10). Ever an exacting exegete, Gikatilla notes that the verse does not say that she prayed "to the Lord," *'el yhwh*, but "over the Lord," *'al yhwh*. From this seemingly irrelevant locution Gikatilla adduces a deep theosophic secret: Hannah's prayer rose to the place above the Tetragrammaton, that is, to the name *'Ehyeh*, the gradation of *Keter*

that is atop *Tif'eret*, "the place of the fortune that is known that bestows from the side of grace and compassion to the one that finds favor in his eyes in the secret of the thirteen attributes of mercy in the *sefirah* of *'Ehyeh*, which is the secret of *Keter*."[77] The axiological application of this ontological point is reflected in the imitation of divine love on the part of the Jew that transcends the conventional distinction between guilt and innocence.

The point was perfectly understood by the Moroccan kabbalist, Ya'aqov 'Ifaragan,[78] who remarked in his commentary on *Pirqei 'Avot*, the rabbinic "Chapter of the Fathers," that *Keter* is called by the sages of the tradition the "attribute of equanimity (*middat ha-hashwa'ah*) for the righteous and the wicked are identical in relation to it."[79] The lower form of divine compassion, wherein mercy is mixed together with judgment, is a more suitable model for human behavior in the social sphere, for only such love can render a just verdict insofar as it is a balance between mercy and judgment, compassion and discipline. In the highest aspect of the divine will, however, there is no judgment at all, and, consequently, this quality must lie beyond the domain of the ethical. Indeed, as Elijah de Vidas expressed the matter, in the highest manifestation of the divine concealment, referred to on the basis of the zoharic terminology as *'atiqa'* (the ancient one), nature, designated by the name *'elohim*, which denotes the attribute of judgment, is transformed, for everything is converted into mercy.[80] The insight expressed here is based in part on the presumed numerological equivalence of the words *ha-ṭeva'*, "nature," and *'elohim*, that is, both words equal 86.[81] The numerical equivalence conveys the philosophical idea that nature is dependent on boundary and delimitation, which are associated with the attribute of judgment. When the latter is contained entirely in mercy, nature is transcended, for there is no order or structure. The trespassing of the natural order constitutes the nature of the miracle, but in this miraculous state the grounds for moral action seem to be undermined by the coincidence of antinomies in the Godhead. Even the wretched one is forgiven his wretchedness in the forgiveness that effaces the difference between right and wrong, irreproachable and liable.

Demarcating the Law by Extending Its Limit

One may contend that the dissolution of dualistic structures implied in the monopsychic consciousness of mystical experience necessitates the overcoming of a more limited perspective based on moral distinctions between right and wrong. Presumably, the kabbalist's encounter of the divine beyond duality would lead to a state of affairs that challenges the strictures of the nomian framework. While I would acknowledge the element of mystical experience that ventures past the limits of lawfulness, I would argue nonetheless that this path beyond the path of law need not necessarily entail the breaking of the law; it may guide one rather to the path that is genuinely no-path, that is, the path beyond the law that provides the very conditions for there to be any law at all, the state of lawfulness

without any law.[82] Before clarifying my position by delving into a detailed textual analysis, let me contrast it with the view expressed by Gershom Scholem on the matter of the antinomian character of mysticism.

In his published work, Scholem repeatedly emphasized that mystical experience presents the possibility of undermining the norms of the given society within which that experience took shape. Scholem's view is based on his assumption regarding the inherently amorphous, and hence potentially anarchic, nature of mystical experience.[83] In the particular history of Judaism, according to Scholem, mystics have been successful to the extent that they have tempered the radically novel and innately antinomian quality of their experiences by the standard norms of the tradition. This yields the paradox regarding the concomitantly innovative and conservative character of mysticism, a cornerstone of Scholem's phenomenological understanding of mystical experience. In an essay on the historical development of Jewish mysticism that appeared in 1944, Scholem demarcated the two main features of the "religious streams" that have converged historically to give shape to the phenomenon of kabbalah in the following way: On the one hand, the goal of these streams was to "arrive at a religious consciousness beyond intellectual apprehension," which is "attained by man's delving into himself by means of contemplation, and the inner illumination which results from this contemplation." On the other hand, these streams have always "tried to maintain their position within the existing Jewish framework of their time and to refrain from controversy with it, insofar as this was possible."[84] Scholem thus considered potential conflict with the halakhic norm as germane to the mystical phenomenon in Judaism. For Scholem the Jewish mystic's encounter with the divine bears in its bosom the germ of antinomianism, for he experiences the "nothingness of revelation" (*Nichts der Offenbarung*),[85] the absolute concreteness of the word of God that can never be expressed in any particular form, the ineffable presence that occasions through its concealed immediacy an "anarchic suspension."[86]

A succinct formulation of Scholem's view is given in the sixth of ten aphorisms entitled "Zehn unhistorische Sätze über Kabbala," which he published in 1958:

> Just as nature, Kabbalistically seen, is nothing but a shadow of the divine name, so one can also speak of a shadow of the law, which is cast ever longer over the Jews' way of life. But in the Kabbalah, the stony wall of the law gradually becomes transparent; a shimmer of the reality surrounded and circumscribed by it breaks through. This alchemy of the law, its transmutation into the transparent, is one of the deepest paradoxes of the Kabbalah, for what in principle could be less transparent than this shimmer, this symbolic aura that now appears? But along with this ever increasing, if also ever more indistinct transparency of the law, the shadows which the law casts over Jewish life dissolve. The end of this process must, logically speaking be Jewish "Reform": the

> shadowless, backgroundless, but no longer irrational, purely abstract humanity of the law as a remnant of its mystical dissolution.[87]

Essential in Scholem's thinking is the recognition of a dialectical process inherent in kabbalistic sources that extends the law beyond the bounds of its own limit.[88] Whether or not we are prepared to accept Scholem's explanation of the inner dynamic of Jewish history leading from the pseudomessianic movements of Sabbatianism and Frankism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the rise of the rationalist enlightenment (*haskalah*) and Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century, there seems to me little reason to question the soundness of his understanding of a dialectical impulse in the kabbalistic sources that tests the center of the tradition at its margins. As he puts the matter elsewhere, the kabbalistic systems were "conceived as conservative ideologies within the frame of Rabbinical Judaism," yet these very systems were so "revolutionary in implication that their conservative character was time and again called into question." In the phenomenon of the kabbalah, therefore, one finds a "mystical trend which changes the face of historical tradition while striving to preserve it unchanged, which extends the limits of religious experience while trying to consolidate them . . . on the one hand it strives forward, while on the other, in delving for new layers of religious experience, it unearths age-old, archaic elements."[89] In another context, Scholem expresses the matter as follows: "Reverence for the traditional has always been deeply rooted in Judaism, and even the mystics, who in fact broke away from tradition, retained a reverent attitude towards it; it led them directly to their conception of the coincidence of true intuition and true tradition. This theory has made possible such a paradox as the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria. . . . Nearly all the important points and major theses in Luria's system are novel, one might even say excitingly novel—and yet they were accepted throughout as true Kabbalah, i.e. traditional wisdom."[90] More specifically, according to Scholem, the implicit utopian element embraced by kabbalists (in some cases more boldly than in others) is predicated on an absorption of the anarchic tendencies within the Torah itself such that the law most fully expresses its potentiality as law at the point when it exceeds the limits of its prescriptions; the law is truly affirmed in the negation of its restrictiveness.[91]

Much is debatable in Scholem's characterizations of Lurianic kabbalah and its aftermath in Sabbatian messianism, but what seems to me basically sound is his recognition of a reaching beyond tradition that grounds the tradition transmitted as kabbalah. What is new is old—the more novel the more ancient. The secret truth of tradition must be discovered, but that dis/covery comes by way of re/covering tradition. This paradox, which figures prominently on the path of kabbalistic thinking, cannot be resolved as a conflict between innovative and conservative approaches, the revolutionary and the traditional. In Lurianic kabbalah, as in kabbalistic thinking more generally, to be radical means to be at

the root of things. But what is at the root but the potentiality for change through the coming-to-be of that which is? Radical concurrently denotes fundamental and insurgent, constitutive and anarchical.

Hence, while I am in basic agreement with the claim of Scholem, I would suggest a change in locution that may help us get beyond the polar logic that inevitably colors Scholem's own dialectical approach. That is, in kabbalistic doctrine, the lawful confrontation with the limits of the law occasions a hypernomianism, which must be distinguished from antinomianism. From a kabbalistic perspective there can be a persuasive argument for one to surpass the laws, but always in tension with fulfilling them, and this most evidently in their abrogation.

Although I would certainly assent to the fact that the historian of religion must always be attentive to the specific historical circumstances that may help explain a particular religious phenomenon, I would counter that it is also necessary to be mindful of enduring sensibilities that help one understand a more immediate context. With respect to the present issue, I am not persuaded that the best approach to account for the hypernomian tendency in kabbalistic literature to extend the law beyond its own limits is due to any single historical event, even if I readily admit that the latter may have served as a catalyst to explain the form the tendency has taken or will take at any given moment. The seed for the hypernomian orientation is planted in several isolated rabbinic dicta, such as the audacious comment attributed to R. Joseph, "The commandments will be nullified in the future," *miṣwot beṭelot le'atit lavo'*.[92] A more modest, but in some ways more puzzling, statement is transmitted in the name of R. Simeon ben Laqish (Reish Laqish), "There are occasions when the nullification of Torah is its foundation (*pe'amim shebiṭṭulah shel torah zehu yesodah*), as it is written, '[I will inscribe on the tablets the commandments that were on the first tablets] that you smashed' (Deut. 10:2). The Holy One, blessed be he, said to Moses, 'Congratulations that you smashed [them].'"[93] The midrashic reading of the scriptural verse, which buttresses the notion that God applauds the audacious act of Moses to break the first tablets of his own volition, is found in other redactional settings in rabbinic material.[94] What is interesting is the use of this notion in the present literary context, which is related more specifically to the idea that the graphic image of smashing the tablets of the commandments, ostensibly an antinomian act, can in fact be in certain situations the very foundation of the law. Simply put, to establish the law, the law must be broken.[95] This notion of accomplishing the law by transgressing the law is applied in some contexts to the particular idea of *tiqqun ha-'olam*, which signifies the need to behave in a manner that does not conform to the requirements of the law for the sake of promoting a greater sense of social well-being.[96] The theme of realizing the potential of the law by means of its revocation is enunciated in another talmudic passage that is worthy of full citation:

> It is written, "It is time to act for the Lord, for they have violated your Torah" (Ps. 119:126). Rava said: This verse can be interpreted from the beginning to the end or from the end to the beginning. Interpreting it from the beginning to the end: "It is time to act for the Lord." Why? "For they have violated your Torah." Interpreting it from the end to the beginning: "For they have violated your Torah." Why? Because "it is time to act for the Lord."[97]

The second alternative proposed in the name of Rava betrays a bold reading of the law against itself insofar as the occasion may indeed arise that calls for the abrogation of the law in an effort to act on behalf of the lawgiver. As discussed below, this orientation evolves in a variety of different ways in the later kabbalistic sources, but it reaches a crescendo in the Sabbatian material wherein the self-cancellation of the law is related to the motif of the suffering messiah, the righteous savior who must endure the travails of the corporeal world of darkness and alienation in order to rectify the primordial sin of Adam that caused the fragmentation and brokenness of the human condition. What is necessary to reiterate at this juncture is that the possibility that fulfillment of the ritual law can come about through its abrogation is a mode of reasoning found in some earlier rabbinic sources, which doubtless had an impact on subsequent kabbalistic writers.

Indeed, one might go so far as to say that a select number of rabbis discerned that the limits of law itself are established by the very possibility of their being exceeded. In this respect, we can speak of the inversion of values that leads one beyond the customary duality of the sanctioned and the prohibited as an integral part of the moral and religious law as it was understood by rabbinic authorities.[98] In support of this orientation, it is of interest to mention a passage attributed to the rabbis that is cited by two biblical exegetes in the latter part of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, Baḥya ben Asher[99] and Menaḥem Recanati,[100] concerning the presumed etymology of the word for pig, *ḥazir*, "for in the future God will restore it (*lehaḥziro*) to us."[101] Baḥya criticizes the masses for interpreting the presumed rabbinic statement as asserting that the pig will become pure for Israel; he attempts to neutralize the ostensible nullification of the law by referring symbolically to the force of the pig rather than to the animal itself. That is, in the messianic future, the force of the pig together with all the other forces will assist rather than harm the Jewish people. Baḥya's effort to mitigate the latent revocation of the halakhic norm notwithstanding, it seems that this statement, if it is indeed an authentic rabbinic dictum, affirms the possibility of a radical shift such that the paradigmatically forbidden animal, the pig, is transformed into a ritually fit animal. According to the locution that I would adopt, this is an illustration of hypernomianism, for the restoration of the pig to holiness indicates an expanding of the boundaries so that what now appears as

impure will be pure in the messianic future. As noted below, this is precisely how kabbalists interpreted the matter at a latter time.

Aesthetic Impulse and Lawful Venturing beyond the Law

From the rabbinic texts discussed above we can adduce the following principle: To transgress is to overstep one's boundary, but by stepping over one's boundary one preserves the line that circumscribes the being of one's transgression. One is here reminded of Rainer Maria Rilke's description of Orpheus, "Und er gehorcht, indem er überschreitet," "And he obeys, even as he oversteps the bounds."[102] With these words Rilke was expressing the view that the poetic inspiration that ensues from the playing of the lyre necessitates the overstepping of the bounds of language on the part of the bard even as he obeys the laws of rhythmic structure and metrical cadence.[103] As Rilke himself formulates the axiom of transgression, "Kundiger böge die Zweige der Weiden, wer die Wurzeln der Weiden erfuhr," "Whoever's known the roots of the willow is better trained to bend the willow's limbs."[104] Reversing the order of Rilke's maxim, it might be said that only by bending the limb does one truly know the root, which is a perfectly apt way to convey the idea (which I deduced from the rabbinic sources discussed in the previous section) that the law most fully expresses its potentiality as law at the point when it exceeds the limits of its prescriptions; the law is truly affirmed in the negation of its restrictiveness. Interestingly enough, on the basis of a careful reading of passages from Goethe's *Faust*, Ernst Bloch similarly referred to the "poetic venturing beyond the limits,"[105] which he relates specifically to music:

> It sings as unrestrained exodus and as extract, music is the supreme art of utopian venturing beyond, whether it drifts or builds. The layer of sound is certainly not always unrestrained . . . but more than anywhere else all figures of venturing beyond the limits are accommodated, indeed even arrive in it . . . *all venturers beyond the limits to the absolute moment are also tonal characters.* . . . The venturers beyond the limits cross into this sphere from their moral sphere; provided that the tonal layer has not become a linguistic and depictive space sui generis, part of a different creation of environment.[106]

Music provides the means through which one advances beyond the limits of the moral sphere to a realm that transcends language. The "latent expressive power" of music that "goes far beyond all known words" encapsulates the utopian striving to exceed all limitation.[107] The "most characteristic aspiration of music," therefore, is for it "to be, to find, to become, language sui generis. Indeed because the expressive power of music lies beyond all known names, in the end expression in music is no longer under discussion at all but *music itself as expression*."[108] Insofar

as music goes toward its own language, which is a *poiesis* that moves away from the limits of verbal expression,[109] it follows that it is one of the most appropriate aesthetic forms to capture the stimulus of mystical proclivity.[110] The inherently transgressive nature of music is expressed as well by Bloch's claim that the "tension of sound passes from being physical to being psychical," for the "most characteristic feature of melody" is that "in each one of its tones the next one is latently audible, lies in the anticipating person, therefore in the expression, which is here above all a humanized expression."[111] The transgressive character of music, which is related inextricably to the transcendence of a linear mode of communicative speech by an even more elemental rhythmic and sequential discourse, is captured as well in these reflections by Jean-François Lyotard:

> It is true that the discourse of music does not refer to a referent in the same way that language does. Nevertheless, music appears as a temporal organization (diachronic, like speech) of discontinuous elements (*articuli*, the notes) defined, like phonemes, by their place in a system (the scale and the rules of harmony). In music the work of the unconscious produces effects of meaning by transgressing diverse levels: temporal organization (rhythm, development), steps between the elements (the scale), discontinuity between the elements (existence of notes), composition of elements out of other elements, sonorous material of so-called musical objects. Let us reverse the proposition: every transgression of this type is equal to a trace of the primary process; that is, a transgression makes the listener grasp the secondary, the "linguistic," the "written" character of the music to which his ear is attuned and in which this trace is marked. Such transgressions then have a critical function, at least as long as they are not in turn connoted, that is, replaced in a new language as a constitutive operation, such as a rhetorical one, although they may be more elementary.[112]

The "critical reversal" occasioned by the musical object, in contrast to the linguistic object, to displace figural signification by affective tension results from the "double demand" that "corresponds to the compromise between a system that allows the production of recognizable musical 'discourses' and the 'free play' of transgressive operations in relation to that system."[113] The narrative composition of musical sound thus points to its ability to extend beyond the limits, but only by conforming to strict laws of harmony.[114] As Lyotard deftly puts the matter, obviously reflecting the interpretation of Greek tragedy on the part of Nietzsche as a reconciliation between the Apolline and Dionysian impulses,[115] "The cry of Dionysus is where we hear the words of Apollo. And, inversely, the Apollonian harmony is where we hear the Bacchic delirium."[116] From the rhetoric of music,

then, we can adduce the operative principle that exemption from law, or what may be more aptly called the melodics of constricting expansion, is not only part of the law, but the bud and flower of the law, its origin and destination.[117]

The issue of the law and its being trespassed is perfectly analogous to the problem of language and its transcendence. The experience of the ineffable marks the limit of human language, but the only way to approach that limit is through language. The unsayable is inaccessible except by way of what is spoken, albeit spoken as that which cannot be said.[118] Echoing a sentiment expressed by a number of scholars,[119] Michel Foucault noted that the "characteristic movement of mysticism is to attempt to join—even if it means crossing the night—the positivity of an existence by opening a difficult line of communication with it."[120] The existence toward which the mystic strives is compared by Foucault to a shelter that is "created as much by the law of the Word as by the open expanse of silence. For in the form of the experience, silence is the immeasurable, inaudible, primal breath from which all manifest discourse issues; or, speech is a reign with the power to hold itself in silent suspense."[121] The preponderant use of symbols on the part of mystics is rooted in the recognition that the ultimate object of their experience is a mystery that inescapably exceeds the boundary of language. In the words of Michel de Certeau, mystical language is characterized by a "split structure," for the "only way to establish a 'symbolic' expression is to separate two terms that are necessary, but contrary to each other." Thus, mystical speech is always a "manifestation of a cut," and consequently the ineffable is "not so much an object of discourse as a marker of the status of language."[122] In a similar fashion, Scholem repeatedly emphasized in his work that symbolic language is employed by mystics (epitomized by the kabbalists) to render transparent that which is beyond all expression, to communicate the incommunicable.[123] The transparency of the symbol relates to the paradoxical necessity of expressing the inexpressible by means of the self-disclosure of that which is concealed.[124] In the very utterance of speech, therefore, language opens up to its own boundlessness, the silence whence the continuous streaming forth of language proceeds.[125] As Heidegger poetically expressed the matter:

> Thinking's saying would be stilled in its being only by becoming unable to say that which must remain unspoken. Such inability would bring thinking face to face with its matter. What is spoken is never, and in no language, what is said.[126]

The articulation of that which cannot be articulated, not in the sense of marking the presence that is absent but rather in the sense of removing the possibility of a presence that is present in any way but as absence, is the unique turn of what may be called the path beyond the modernist aesthetic. As Lyotard ex-

pressed the matter, "The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable."[127]

In a book published several years ago, a contemporary philosopher, Stephen Ross, remarked that pushing to the limit is basic to the very nature of reason as judgmental. In its quest for truth, reason is guided by aporia, the critical suspension of belief that propels the beginning of the way of inquiry and delimits the end. In its composition of truth, therefore, reason is dependent on the disruptive capacity of doubt to displace certainties in order to illumine the untruths of truth and the misrepresentations of representation.[128] When judged from this perspective the faculty of rational judgment itself plays a transgressive role in the human desire to acquire knowledge. Articulating this position, Ross writes:

> The generality of philosophy both fails to provide undivided representations and divides the dividedness in reason and truth into aporia. Aporia sounds the music of truth. It echoes transgression. Aporia finds itself where representation reaches its limits and displaces itself. . . . Aporia stands at the site where philosophy acknowledges the limits of its multiple representations. . . . The limits of representation, limitation, judgment, reason, and truth are transgressed within every particular mode of judgment and truth. This may be understood not as a representation of limitation but as the capacity of judgment and reason to sacrifice themselves to establish their truth. In this sense, intermodality and multimodality resound among the untruths that compose truth.[129]

The postmodern dynamic of establishing the limit by exceeding the bound, which allows for the attainment of untruth that facilitates the construction of truth, provides an adequate way to formulate the dialectic of hypernomianism that is a prominent feature of the mystical experience in the history of kabbalah. The paradox to which I am alluding may be expressed in terms of Franz Kafka's well-known parable from *The Trial* entitled "Before the Law." To get beyond the law one must go through the law, for the point of departure is the point of entry, the way out is the way in.[130] To close the door of the law definitively would be to remove the means by which one trespasses the law, which is not the same thing as discarding the law.[131] Here one would do well to recall that, according to Scholem, Kafka's world is appropriately designated "theological," even though it is a world in which God does not appear.[132] On the contrary, it is precisely the absence of God from the world that marks his presence in the world, a conundrum that

Scholem relates to his understanding of the kabbalistic notion of divine revelation as the unmediated word. As he puts the matter in a letter to Benjamin dated 17 July 1934:

> Kafka's world is the world of revelation, but of revelation seen of course from that perspective in which it is returned to its own nothingness. . . . The *nonfulfillability* of what has been revealed is the point where a *correctly* understood theology (as I, immersed in my Kabbalah, think . . .) coincides most perfectly with that which offers the key to Kafka's work. Its problem is not, dear Walter, its *absence* in a preanimistic world, but the fact that it cannot be *fulfilled*.[133]

To pass through the door of the law is to get beyond the law; one does not, however, pass to a state of lawless anarchy, but to a state of anarchic lawfulness, the anarchy that licitly grounds the very possibility of there being any law. Interestingly, in an unpublished manuscript from 1926, Scholem remarked that Kafka's parable of the guardian of the law is "like a kind of summary of Jewish theology, which in its unique dialectic is not destructive but, on the contrary, radiates a powerful inner melancholy. Here the true talmudic thinking breaks its light into a rainbow of colors."[134] The relatively young Scholem well understood that the absence of God in Kafka's parable of the law reflected something essential to rabbinic theology, for precisely this negation of presence allows for the affirmation of the ultimate foundation of the law in the "anarchic suspension"[135] of the law. The kabbalists likewise perceived that this hypernomian element, the lawful venturing beyond the law, is a central aspect of the attitude toward ritual in the Jewish tradition.

Emmanuel Levinas formulated the matter in terms that are particularly germane to my analysis: "Whatever our mistrust towards the letter and our thirst for the Spirit may be, monotheistic humanity is a humanity of the Book. Scriptural tradition provides the trace of a beyond of this very tradition."[136] The beyond to which Levinas refers is the transcendence of God, the wholly other that is the mark of holiness, that which is utterly separate. The otherwise-than-being is signified by the ineffable name, YHWH, which, according to rabbinic tradition, is routinely pronounced by another name, Adonai. The name is thus simultaneously hidden and revealed. The philosophical implication of the liturgical custom that the Tetragrammaton is never uttered as it is written is that language is always paired with the silence that transcends it. "Whatever comes in the context of meaning must also always be anchoretic or holy; the voice which resounds in speech must also be the voice which softens or falls silent."[137] The ineffability of the most sacred name points to that which exceeds language, the enigma of transcendence, the trace of that which is both beyond the tradition and its ultimate

foundation. Absolute holiness is demarcated in the book by the name that cannot be erased, for it betokens the erasure of that which cannot be spoken.

Transmoral Pietism beyond Good and Evil

My contention, moreover, is that the extreme pietism expressed in some kabbalistic literature, which I have identified as hypernomian, is best characterized as transmoral as opposed to immoral, for the path the kabbalist walks carries him beyond the normal categories of good and evil rather than abrogating them. As I noted above, there are various levels of mystical experience that reflect the different stages in the dynamic unfolding of the divine nature. At one stage the dichotomy is appropriate, for the divine itself is dichotomized into polar opposites, but at another stage the mystic experiences and is integrated into the unity of the Godhead that transcends the division into right and left, holy and impure. But what does that tell us about the ethical nature of the mystical experience? Is there still the distinction between good and evil for the mystic who has experienced the ultimate unity of the divine or are the antinomies transmuted into the other such that the good is evil and the evil good? If the latter, should we adopt the language of Scholem and speak of "redemption through sin,"[138] or are we better off speaking of the matter as deliverance from the duality of redemption and sin? Here, too, the limit is tested, and language itself mimics its very utterance by proving the opposites to be true.

Hypernomianism and transmorality are two expressions of the same phenomenon. Ritual and moral imperatives are binding on the Jewish mystic, but the mystical experience is transformative. The surpassing of ritualism and moralism is indicative of the implicit soteriological aspect of the mystical experience, an experience that overextends its limits. Some kabbalists have proleptically anticipated the eschatological moment in which the dualities of the world are overcome such that there no longer is a need to distinguish in an absolute way between the permissible and the forbidden, good and evil. The particular path of the Jewish mystical experience leads out of the specificity of this one tradition, but it does so in a manner that necessitates the walking of the path over and over again to find the way out. If one contemplates the possibility of following the path to get beyond the path definitively, then one is off the path and thus will never get beyond the path. To traverse the path one must travel the path. In my estimation, this is a distinctive feature of the mystical phenomenon in the history of religions.

The dialectical overcoming of the nomian and ethical parameters is fully realized in kabbalistic eschatology. More recent scholarly work has shown that Scholem's assertion that only in the sixteenth-century Lurianic kabbalah, which took shape in Safed after the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century, are the mystical and messianic welded together must be qualified. Several scholars have put forth the argument that this merging

of messianism and mysticism is characteristic of the kabbalistic orientation from a much earlier period; indeed, according to some, the view that the eschatological end is a return to the cosmological beginning should be attributed to the very dawning of the literary evolution of the kabbalah in medieval Provence and northern Spain.[139] I am inclined myself to accept this view. For the purpose of this discussion the outcome of that debate is relevant, for if the bypassing of the limit, whether ritualistic or ethical, is linked to the eschatological factor, the degree to which we succeed in ascertaining whether or not the latter is intrinsic to understanding kabbalistic ontology and axiology will help us decide on the status occupied by the hypernomian tendency in the religious philosophy proffered by the kabbalists.

Until the messianic era, which is marked by the abolition of the evil force and the consequent reintegration of the demonic in the divine, there is a definite boundary separating good and evil. As noted above, many of the traditional rituals are understood in terms of this dichotomy. Indeed, the very idea of holiness, the attainment of which is the ultimate goal of the pious life, is based on this notion of keeping the divine and the demonic distinct. In the felicitous formulation of the eighteenth-century Italian kabbalist, Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, the blurring of the distinction between the two realms would constitute a form of overstepping one's boundary, *hassagat gevul*, following the language of Deut. 27:17. By contrast, in the time of messianic rectification, there is an expansion of the boundary, *harḥavat gevul*, which entails the overpowering of judgment by mercy and the consequent restoration of the former to the latter.[140] Luzzatto expresses this idea in slightly different terms in a second passage:

> The boundary derives from the power of strength,[141] but when peace is greatly strengthened, mercy[142] overpowers strength, and then all the lights draw close to one another in a great affinity, for the power of closeness and unity grows strong in the lights. . . . Every power draws close to its neighbor and there is no great need for boundary. . . . The power of peace, which is strengthened, unifies everything in a complete unity.[143]

In the state of exile, the demonic shell causes the separation of male and female and thereby prevents the complete unification and perfection of existence. In the messianic state of repair (*tiqqun*), evil will be annihilated and the good that is within the evil, the spark of light trapped in the shell, will be restored to the realm of holiness.[144] In a third passage, Luzzatto articulates this idea in a most daring way, borrowing the formulation of the sixteenth-century kabbalist, Abraham Galante,[145] which in turn develops the locution of a passage found in several collections of rabbinic midrashim and earlier medieval sources,[146] as discussed above:

> Had the holiness not been there [in the demonic shell] it could not have existed even for a moment, as the verse says, "You keep them all alive" (Neh. 9:6), even the pig and the insect. Why is [the pig] called *ḥazir*? Because in the future it shall revert (*laḥazor*) [to holiness] and it shall be permissible for the aspect of the shell and the desire, and even the archon of Esau, who is the angel of death and the evil inclination, shall be abolished, and death shall be destroyed forever, and the holiness shall be purified from the shell, "in that day there shall be one Lord [with one name]" (Zech. 14:9).[147]

The full disclosure of divine unity is predicated on the subjugation and ultimate transmutation of the impure into the holy. The apparent dualism of the current unredeemed state thus gives way to the monism of the redeemed world. "When we ascend more to the root of things," Luzzatto writes in another context, "we comprehend how the essence of all is the unity of the *'Ein Sof*, blessed be he. . . . And the essence of the unity is that even evil itself is evil only in its beginning, for in the end everything will be transformed into good."[148] In the state of redemption, therefore, all things are reintegrated in the Infinite such that there is no more distinction between good and evil, the permissible and the prohibited. Indeed, even the pig, which perhaps best emblematizes the restrictiveness of legalistic Judaism in its classical sources, is no longer forbidden, because as its very name suggests, in the messianic future it shall be restored to holiness.

In light of this collapse of duality in the face of the ultimate oneness of all that exists, the obvious question must again be raised: What is the role of morality in such a state? Is it proper or even meaningful to speak of an ethics beyond good and evil, a transmoral morality? Some kabbalists were certainly aware of the potential subversion of tradition that emerges from within the tradition itself. One of the oft-cited examples of this phenomenon is the position regarding the nature of the law adopted by the anonymous author of the later strata of zoharic literature, *Ra'aya' Meheimna'* and *Tiqqunei Zohar*, which were most likely written in the early decades of the fourteenth century. According to one formulation offered by this author, the Torah of Emanation, which derives from the Tree of Life, is distinguished from the Torah of Creation, which derives from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.[149] As the terminology itself suggests, only the Torah of Creation, which has sovereignty in this historical cycle, is characterized by the duality of good and evil. The nomian tradition in Judaism, which is based on the distinction between permissible and prohibited, reflects the ontological state of this Torah. But what about the messianic future? What is the positive content of the Torah of the Tree of Life? In fact, posing the question in this way indicates the failure to grasp the phenomenon at hand. The Torah of the Tree of Life has no specific form, for it surpasses all duality and delimitation, which are related to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The dichotomy between holy and profane,

which is the basis for the Torah in its present configuration, will no longer prevail in the eschatological age when the force of impurity will be totally removed from the world (based on Zech. 13:2). In that state, there is no opposition between God and the Other Side, the Holy One and Satan, fulfilling the verse, "The Lord alone will guide them, no alien god at his side" (Deut. 32:12). The messianic Torah, which is identified more specifically as *Sefer ha-Zohar*, emanates from the splendor of the supernal Mother, the third of the ten divine emanations (*Binah*), and restores the ontological condition of the Garden of Eden prior to the sin of Adam and Eve. It is in this sense that we must interpret the statement that Israel will depart from the exile by means of the *Zohar*,[150] that is, the latter marks the attainment of a state of affairs when the demonic has been obliterated and thus the Torah of duality (rabbinic halakhah) is superseded by a Torah that reflects the spiritual consciousness of nondifferentiated unity, which constitutes the liberty that shall be proclaimed throughout the land (Lev. 25:10). To be sure, the anonymous kabbalist behind the composition of these texts maintained that even in the messianic time there will be a distinction between the spiritual elite of Israel, the enlightened (*maskilim*) who are properly called human beings (*'adam*), and the ignorant (*'am ha-'areṣ*) or the mixed multitude (*'erev rav*), who are compared to and designated as beasts (*behemot*). Interestingly enough, the distinction between human and beast generally applied in zoharic literature to the relationship of Israel to the other nations[151] is here applied to a division within the community of Israel, although even in this context those who are designated "beasts" derive ultimately from the non-Israelite nations.[152] A hierarchical element is preserved, therefore, even in the messianic era, which in the end mimics the social stratification operative in the Sinaitic theophany. In the language of the text itself:

> In the future, Israel will taste of the Tree of Life, which is this book of the *Zohar* by means of which they will go out from exile in mercy. . . . The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which entails what is forbidden and what is permissible, impurity and purity, no longer rules over Israel, for their sustenance is from the side of the Tree of Life wherein there is no conflict from the side of evil and argument from the side of impurity. . . . What is prohibited and what is permissible, impurity and purity, are not removed from the ignorant, for from their perspective there is no difference between exile and the days of messiah except for the subjugation of the nations, for they do not taste of the Tree of Life and thus they need the code of law based on what is forbidden and what is permitted, impurity and purity. They are abhorrent in relation to the sages in the manner of the darkness before the light.[153]

Messianic consciousness involves the sense of illumination from the divine splendor, which is captured in the brilliance of the zoharic text—indeed, the

nature of the light of redemption is linked in an intrinsic way to the secret based on the numerological equivalence of the words *raz*, mystery, and *'or*, light[154]—that brings the enlightened onto the path beyond the path of law, and not simply onto the path that abrogates the law, which is itself nothing but a particular turn on the path of law. In an obvious polemical jab at the perspective articulated in the talmudic corpus,[155] which was codified by Maimonides,[156] the unenlightened here are described as maintaining that the only difference between the present exilic state and the messianic era is political in nature. The ignorant remain, therefore, in the condition of spiritual ignorance, which is the true nature of exile. By contrast, in the messianic state, the enlightened are no longer subject to the domination of the Tree of dualities. We are surely justified in taking the further step and arguing that for the enlightened in this historical epoch as well it is possible to experience messianic consciousness, which dutifully liberates the soul from the yoke of the commandments even in the ritualistic enactment of those very commandments. That is to say, release from the weight of obligation is not attained by discarding the laws, but rather by performing them with an intensity that pushes beyond their limit even as that very limit is established in the act of transgression. Indeed, a case can be made that the transgressive element not only establishes the law by setting its limit, but it represents the utopian joy of excess that is contained in the nomian restrictiveness. Here one is reminded of the insightful remark of Lacan who thus reflects on the Freudian notion that civilization begins with the sinful drama of the murder of the father, an inaugural act of transgression that establishes the institution of law: "We are, in fact, led to the point that where we accept the formula that without a transgression there is no access to jouissance, and, to return to Saint Paul, that that is precisely the function of the Law. Transgression in the direction of jouissance only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law."[157] A similar theme regarding transgression as the ultimate measure of law is made in the following comments of Michel Foucault in his reflections on the thought of Maurice Blanchot:

> In fact, the presence of the law is its concealment. Sovereignly, the law haunts cities, institutions, conduct, and gestures; whatever one does, however great the disorder and carelessness, it has already applied its might. . . . Taking liberties is not enough to interrupt it; you might think that you have detached yourself from it and can observe its exercise from without. The moment you believe that you can read its decrees from afar and that they apply only to other people is the moment you are closest to the law. . . . Yet this perpetual manifestation never illuminates what the law says or wants: the law is not the principle or inner rule of conduct. It is the outside that envelops conduct, thereby removing it from all interiority; it is the darkness beyond its

> borders; it is the void that surrounds it, converting, unknown to anyone, its singularity into the gray monotony of the universal and opening around it a space of uneasiness, of dissatisfaction, of multiplied zeal. And of transgression. How could one know the law and truly experience it, how could one force it to come into view, to exercise its powers clearly, to speak, without provoking it, without pursuing it into its recesses, without resolutely going even farther into the outside into which it is always receding? . . . That is why transgression endeavors to overstep prohibition in an attempt to attract the law to itself; it always surrenders to the attraction of the essential withdrawal of the law; it obstinately advances into the opening of an invisibility over which it will never triumph; insanely, it endeavors to make the law appear in order to be able to venerate it and dazzle it with its own luminous face; all it ends up doing is reinforcing the law in its weakness—the lightness of the night that is invincible, impalpable substance. The law is the shadow toward which every gesture necessarily advances; it is itself the shadow of the advancing gesture.[158]

The mystical impulse in Judaism (as in other religions) tests the center of the tradition at its limits. That which demarcates and dissipates the limit may be called transgressive.[159] In this sense, the attitude I am attributing to kabbalistic sources is suitably designated "hypernomian," for the effort is to go beyond the limit of the law and in so doing enact its proper boundary. The unitive encounter with the limitlessness of the divine provides the experiential basis for the overcoming of the dichotomies that inform normative practice in both the realms of religion and ethics. Unlike Scholem, however, I do not attribute this phenomenon to the inherently amorphous nature of the mystical experience. On the contrary, as I have argued, even formlessness is experienced as form, namely, the form of formlessness.[160] But this is just another way of stating the paradox that the hand that writes the law is the hand that erases the law, indeed, erases it as it is written. Can we, however, imagine erasure with no trace of that which has been erased?

From this perspective it might be said that hypernomianism lies coiled like a serpent in the heart of the law in Judaism. Thus, employing the rabbinic misreading of the word *ḥarut*, "incised" in the verse, "The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing, incised upon the tablets" (Exod. 32:16), as *ḥerut*, that is, "freedom,"[161] the author of *Tiqqunei Zohar* remarks that this freedom is related to the Tree of Life.[162] In an astonishing reversal of the rabbinic interpretation, the kabbalistic text proffers the view that freedom is liberation from and not compliance with the law, but it is a freedom from the law that is nevertheless deduced from the description of the tablets themselves. The contextualization of the freedom from law in the tablets of law underscores the

full force of the hypernomian position. The issue for the kabbalists is never abrogation of Jewish law in isolation from its fulfillment, for transgressing beyond the limit of the law facilitates the determination of the boundaries of the law, just as keeping within the boundaries of the law promotes the demarcation of the limit of the law.

To state the issue in somewhat less enigmatic terms: The author of *Ra'aya' Meheimna'* and *Tiqqunei Zohar* accepted the standard kabbalistic orientation regarding the theurgical importance of ritual observance in the current historical epoch.[163] Transgression results in the separation of the masculine and feminine potencies of the divine, which is reflected in the exigency of Israel's exile. In the time of exile, the enemies of Israel, identified as Esau, Ishmael, and the seventy nations, are all in peace and prosperity, whereas Israel is oppressed and impoverished.[164] Those engaged in the study of Oral Torah are identified as the "daughters" of Israel spared the decree of Pharaoh that all first-born Israelite males were to be thrown into the Nile, which here stands symbolically for the sea of demonic impurity.[165] Exile is described as a state wherein poverty rules over Israel, a spiritual destitution that is identified more specifically as the impoverishment of Torah, which results in the death of those who transgress the commandments.[166] Not only is it the case that Israel's exilic predicament is related to the neglect of both the Torah and the commandments,[167] but the light of the Oral Torah, which is related to ritual performance (based on Prov. 6:23), is portrayed as the means through which the final redemption shall occur: "Through it the Holy One, blessed be he, will be revealed to Moses in the Torah in the final exile in the manner of the first redemption, concerning which it says, 'The angel of the Lord appeared to him in the blazing fire out of the bush' (Exod. 2:3). In the first [exile], it was through the burning bush of prophecy, but in the final exile it is through the burning bush of Torah."[168] The ultimate messianic redemption comes, therefore, through the *Shekhinah*, the fire of Torah that exceeds the level of prophecy associated with the first redemption. When judged from this vantage point, it is incontestable that this kabbalist embraced the more general acceptance of halakhah prevalent in the history of kabbalah. Consider as well the following passage, which unequivocally affirms the nomian perspective:

> Those who are engaged in the Torah and the commandments for the sake of the Holy One, blessed be he, and his *Shekhinah*, not in order to receive a prize, but as a son who is obligated in the honor of his father and mother, such a one is certainly bound to and inscribed in the Central Pillar[169] and his *Shekhinah*, as if he is one with it. But the one who has Torah without the commandment or the commandment without Torah, it is as if there is separation within him. The one and the other should be like a tree whose branches spread to the right and to the left, and one tree is in the middle of the two.[170]

Nevertheless, the same author discerned in the nomian perspective an aspect that points beyond the threshold of normative ritual observance. The ultimate fulfillment of the Torah is predicated on the mystical insight that all things are holy, the shell and the core, the foreskin and the corona. In an extraordinary passage from *Tiqqunei Zohar*, the exile is depicted as the plight in which the people of Israel, the *Shekhinah*, and the Holy One are impoverished since the divine is displaced from the space of his permanent dwelling in the Jerusalem Temple. The particular vantage point from which both the Holy One and the *Shekhinah* are considered indigent is the *ṣaddiq*, the phallic aspect, which has been blemished on account of the transgressions of the children of Israel below. In this defective state, the procreative attribute of God, the righteous foundation of the world, is compared (on the basis of Job 14:11) to the river that has dried up.[171] The optimal situation set in contrast to the depraved predicament of exile is characterized as a time when the female is reunited with the male so that the latter has a permanent resting place. The phallic overflow to the feminine is restored, and as a result the destitute *Shekhinah*, which is compared to the parched garden, is irrigated and thereby transformed into a river, an image that no doubt signifies her gender transformation from barren female to fecund male.

What is especially important for my interest is the description of the dual nature of the *Shekhinah* offered in this context, which is related more specifically to the symbol of the Oral Torah: "She is [called] kabbalah when she receives from the master of charity *(ba'al ṣedaqah)*, which is the Written Torah. When she approaches him to receive she is called halakhah, and when she receives from him she is called kabbalah. . . . Halakhah is from the left side, kabbalah is from the right side."[172] The *Shekhinah* is identified as the Oral Torah in contrast to the masculine Written Torah. But the Oral Torah is further divided into two aspects, the legalistic (halakhah) and the mystical (kabbalah). In the first phase of the redemptive process, the *Shekhinah* is manifest in the form of halakhah, for she is on the way to receive from the masculine (the word *halakhah* is from the root *halakh*, to go or to be on the way); in the second phase, however, the *Shekhinah* is transformed from halakhah to kabbalah, for she has received the overflow from the male (the word *qabbalah* is from the root *qibbel*, to receive). Just as the exile is related primarily to the drying up of the phallic potency, so the redemption is depicted as the restored virility of the phallus. The overflow causes the masculine *waw* to unite with the feminine *dalet*, the result of which is that the latter is transformed into the letter *he'*, which is to say, the insolvent *Shekhinah* is repositioned as the final letter of the Tetragrammaton, thereby completing the name by restoring the feminine to the masculine. This repositioning entails another ontological transformation, which is related to the claim that the word *ṣaddiq* (the righteous one) is converted to *ṣedaqah* (charity).[173] Redemption signifies the restoration of the feminine to the masculine, but also the refinement of masculinity itself, the elevation of *ṣaddiq* to *ṣedaqah*.

In the same section of *Tiqqunei Zohar*, a threefold classification is applied to the *Shekhinah*:

> She is called the halakhah of the king when she approaches him with the two legs, which are the two pillars of truth.[174] When she is lifted to the body by the two arms of the king,[175] she is called kabbalah. When he kisses her with his mouth, she called the Oral Torah. . . . When she rises on her feet in the final exile, she is called the halakhah given to Moses at Sinai; when she rests in the arms of the king, she is called the kabbalah[176] given to Moses at Sinai; when she rests in the mouth of the king, immediately [it says] "I spoke to him mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:5).[177]

This passage is extremely important, for it indicates that the symbolic valence of the Oral Torah relates to an ontological condition that exceeds even the state wherein the term kabbalah appropriately applies to the *Shekhinah*. The three states of being that are assigned to the *Shekhinah*, which consist of halakhah, kabbalah, and Oral Torah, correspond in a sequential manner to three stages in the redemptive process: Halakhah denotes the beginning of this process when the *Shekhinah* rises to her feet to go to unite with the masculine; kabbalah denotes the second phase when the *Shekhinah* has been received into the arms of the masculine; and Oral Torah signifies the ultimate redemption when the *Shekhinah* unites with the masculine through the kiss and she is thus described as resting in the mouth of the king. The true realization of Oral Torah, therefore, lies beyond both halakhah and kabbalah. It is a state of complete union between the *Shekhinah* and the Holy One, which is related to the scriptural account of the mouth-to-mouth revelation of God to Moses, a theme that is also conveyed by the image of the kiss. The three aspects of *Shekhinah* can be viewed as three phases in the passionate play between the masculine and feminine potencies of the divine. The final moment of reparation thus is not a rejection of the law, but its teleological actualization in the constitution of Oral Torah in its mystical valence as the culmination of the erotic drama.

Perhaps the point is best illustrated from the case of the pseudomessianic movement surrounding Sabbatai Ṣevi that evolved in the seventeenth century. In the literature produced by the leading figures of the movement, there was much debate concerning the question of the temporary or permanent abolition of traditional religious laws and customs. One view, however, that the extreme and moderate Sabbatians shared was that the "strange acts" (*ma'asim zarim*) of defiance were endowed with religious significance, for they were dialectically related to the halakhic tradition. That is, breaking the law was done for the sake of fulfilling it. Consider, for example, the following passage extracted from *Liqquṭei Raza' de-Malka' Meshiḥa'*, a collection of Nathan of Gaza's teachings concerning the secret of the messianic king extant in manuscript:

> It is known that the nations of the word are called profane (*ḥol*), and this is the secret [of the rabbinic injunction that] the non-Jew who observes the Sabbath should be punished by death. But Israel is called holy (*qadosh*), [as in the verse] "Israel was holy to the Lord" (Jer. 2:3), and the messianic king is the holy of the holies (*qodesh qedashim*). How is it possible for him to be in the gradation of the profane? Rather the meaning is that in the future he will go out from his holy gradation with a direct intention, and he will enter the gradation of the profane for the sake of the redemption of Israel, to effect purifications and rectifications (*berurim we-tiqqunim*). Therefore his name is called *bar niflei*.[178]

The esoteric significance of the talmudic name of the messiah, *bar niflei*,[179] relates to the phenomenon of intentional sinning on the part of the redeemer; he is the one who stumbles or falls.[180] The crossing of the boundary from holy to profane, symbolically enacted in the act of apostasy, is ultimately for the benefit of Israel. For Sabbatai Ṣevi and his supporters, therefore, acts of breaking the law were considered themselves religious rites. More paradoxical than the notion of the holy sinner is the idea of cultic sinning, which in some cases even involved uttering a blessing or a liturgical formula before a transgression was committed. In Sabbatian ideology, the overturning of Jewish ritual is itself a ritualistic performance, and thus transgressing the Torah yielded the invention of new forms of ceremonial behavior.[181] According to Nathan, the most important demand is to have faith in Sabbatai Ṣevi, and by having such faith in the messiah one establishes all of the Torah. Nathan repeatedly relates this idea to the passage in the Babylonian Talmud according to which the prophet Habakkuk reduced all of the 613 commandments to the one related in the verse, "the righteous man lives through his faith" (Hab. 2:4).[182] The original Hebrew reads *ṣaddiq be-'emunato yiḥyeh*, which is taken by the Sabbatians to be an allusion to Sabbatai Ṣevi since the first letters of these three words spell *ṣevi*.[183] The important point for this analysis is that belief in the messianic figure constitutes the fulfillment of Torah, which is realized in the one commandment that comprises all 613 commandments. To illustrate the point I cite another passage from the aforementioned *Liqquṭei Raza' de-Malka' Meshiḥa'*:

> The true messiah revealed the secret of the Godhead, which was hidden. . . . And it is known that knowledge of the true God is equivalent to all the rest of the Torah . . . as it says in the Talmud in [the tractate of] Makkot:[184] R. Simlai expounded that the 613 commandments were given to Moses at Sinai. David came and established them on eleven. Micah came and established them on three. Isaiah came and established them on two. Habakkuk came and established them on one, as it says, "the righteous man lives through his faith" (Hab. 2:4).[185]

One might well hear an echo of the Pauline orientation with respect to the question of faith and law, which became so influential in the subsequent evolution of the church. As a number of scholars have pointed out, Sabbatian theology is marked by the complex appropriation of Christian soteriology, which is combined with the conversion of the presumed messiah to Islam.[186] The fascinating element of the Sabbatian phenomenon from the perspective of the history of religions is that there is a consequential breaking down of the walls separating Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but the integrity of the three monotheistic traditions is nevertheless preserved. What is most relevant to this analysis is an appreciation of the kabbalistic understanding of the symbol of faith, for it is this symbolism that lies behind the claim of Nathan regarding the need to express one's faith in the messiah. The kabbalistic interpretation of the "mystery of faith," *raza' di-meheimanuta'* or its Hebrew equivalent *sod ha-'emunah* (a locution, traceable back to the *Zohar*, which is itself probably indebted to Christian terminology) relates to the union of the male and female aspects of the divine. In classical kabbalistic literature, the means to achieve this mystery was fulfillment of traditional commandments. The notion of mystery that is operative here must be rendered in sacramental terms, for the presumption is that ritual itself is transformed into a symbolic embodiment through which the divine permeates the sphere of the practitioner at the same time that the practitioner gains access to the realm of the divine. By fulfilling traditional commandments with the proper mystical intent, the individual is not only connected to God, but he provides the symbolic texture in which the invisible presence of the divine can be seen in its invisibility and the ineffable name can be uttered in its ineffability. The seeing of the invisible and the utterance of the ineffable constitute the ultimate mystery of faith, the union of masculine and feminine. The assertion that the messiah is the embodiment of faith suggests that one no longer needs to fulfill the commandments in order to attain the mystery of faith, for the latter is incarnate in Sabbatai Ṣevi since he encapsulates the androgyny of the divine in his very being.[187] Insofar as Sabbatai Ṣevi is the symbolic embodiment of the mystery of the androgynous unity of God, knowledge of the secret of God, which is the mystical essence of the Torah, necessitates belief in his messianic status. The extent to which Nathan identified Sabbatai Ṣevi with the Torah is underscored in one complex passage wherein the production of the twenty-two letters of the Torah by the effulgence of the light of the straight line (*qaw ha-yashar*) is said to result from the illumination of the light of the soul of the messiah in the primordial amorphous shape (*golem*).[188] The symbolic correlation of the messiah and Torah implies that the ultimate redemption depends on the full realization of Torah. Significantly, Nathan contrasts the first redemption from Egypt and the final redemption of the messianic era on the grounds that only the latter can be complete since the perfect deliverance must come by way of the strictures of Torah. When the Israelites went out from Egypt they were slaves and they did not have the "script of freedom" (*ketav ḥeiru*), which is the Torah.[189] From this we may deduce the principle that liberty is attainable only through subjugation to the law.

The surpassing of law, which I assume encompasses both religious ritual and moral codes, does not betoken a desire to destroy, punish, and relinquish religion on account of anger and revenge,[190] nor does it stem from the personal encounter with the God of Israel.[191] On the contrary, the dialectical tension within the tradition itself yields the way to transcend the limits of the tradition. The shattering of the chains of the law results in an intensified subservience to the law. The full paradox of the situation is underscored by the image to which I refer above: Freedom from the commanding voice of God is inscribed on the tablets of the commandments. The law, therefore, bears in its own bosom the possibility of transcending the law. This paradox is not exclusive to the kabbalistic tradition in the religious history of Judaism, but in the writings of the kabbalists, and especially those who attempted to rationalize the apostasy of Sabbatai Ṣevi, we find one of its boldest formulations. Even if one does not wish to accept the extreme expressions of departing from halakhah in Sabbatian and Frankist circles, it is evident that within the mystical tradition enunciated by the kabbalists there is a path that leads beyond the path, which is not a path of breaking the law, but a path of fulfilling the inscription of the law by its own erasure.

Notes

1. My presentation of the kabbalistic sensibility reflects the approach of Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 126–27, regarding the mutual dependence of the values a particular culture holds (ethos) and the general order of existence within which it finds itself (worldview).
2. See *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, edited by Elliot R. Wolfson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 64–66 (English introduction).
3. *Kitvei Ramban*, edited by Ḥayyim D. Chavel, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1964), 2:496–97. See Charles Mopsik, *Les Grands textes de la cabale: Les rites qui font Dieu* (Paris: Verdier, 1993), 115–24.
4. Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei 'Orah*, edited by Joseph Ben-Shlomo, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), 1:249.
5. This exegetical strategy is employed by the anonymous author of *Ra'aya' Meheimna'* and *Tiqqunei Zohar*. See Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, translated by David Goldstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1101.
6. Meir ibn Gabbai, *'Avodat ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem, 1992), Ḥeleq ha-Yiḥud, ch. 21, p. 48.
7. See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1969), 37–50.
8. The intellectual roots for the typological classification of two schools of kabbalistic orientation are found in nineteenth-century scholarship, particularly the work of Adolph Jellinek, *Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik* (Leipzig: A.M. Colditz, 1853), 24–26; idem, *Philosophie und Kabbala* (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1854), Erstes Heft, xi. The typology figured prominently in Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1956), 124, but it has become popular through the work of Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah New Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), xi–xx. See Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, "Continuity and Revision in the Study of the Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 16 (1991): 175.
9. See Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, translated by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Schocken, 1991), 56–87; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*; 450–58; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *AJS Review* 11 (1986): 27–52.

10. For a fuller discussion of this matter, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and History in the *Zohar*," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, edited by Elisheva Carlebach, David S. Myers, and John M. Efron (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 214–46.
11. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Hebraic and Hellenic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*," *Poetics Today* 19 (1998): 147–76, esp. 168–72. The fuller implication of my position would be a challenge to the standard view regarding the separation of mysticism and ethics in the early kabbalistic literature. See Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1986), 76; and the reference to Tishby cited below in n. 13.
12. For the argument that the blending of mysticism and ethics in the kabbalistic tradition had an impact on Rosenzweig's notion of *imitatio dei*, which is related to the configuration of the divine face, see Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 261–67.
13. Tishby, *Wisdom of Zohar*, 1329–30.
14. For a fuller exploration of this matter, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Ontology, Alterity, and Ethics in Kabbalistic Anthropology," *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 129–55.
15. See Dan, *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics*, 84–87.
16. *Tomer Devorah* (Venice, 1558), 2a.
17. Ibid., 16b.
18. Bracha Sack, "The 'First Version' of the *Tomer Devorah* of R. Moses Cordovero," *Asufot* 9 (1995): 171 (in Hebrew).
19. The strongest advocate for reading Cordovero in a "magical" as opposed to "theosophic" light is Moshe Idel, *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 67–74.
20. This insight runs to the core of kabbalistic speculation as is attested from some of the earliest Provençal and Geronese documents that present the mystical idea of *devequt*, conjunction with God, which is facilitated by the proper intention (*kawwanah*) in prayer. For a richly nuanced discussion of the idea of *kawwanah* in the early kabbalists, see Gershom Scholem, *Origin of the Kabbalah*, edited by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and translated by Allan Arkush (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 299–309. In a previous study, "The Concept of the Kavvanah in the Early Kabbalah," in *Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship*, edited by A. Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 169–70, Scholem clearly noted the importance of understanding the kabbalistic notion of intentionality as a confluence of the mystical and the magical, even though the former implied negation of the will and the latter assertion of the will. More revealing than what Scholem calls the "magical" is what scholars today would refer to as the "theurgical," that is, the presumption that one has the ability to impact the nature of the divine through one's mystical intentions. The early kabbalists emphasize, time and again, that the conjunction of the soul with the divine facilitates the opening of the supernal fountain and the consequent overflow of light, which sustains the lower worlds. The blending of the mystical and theurgical is appreciated in the analysis of Seth Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Worship and Mystical Experience in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1991, 317–34; see the partial reworking of this material in idem, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, edited by Robert A. Herrera (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 123–58, esp. 133–53.
21. *Zohar* 2:95b.
22. For the background of this term in thirteenth-century kabbalah, especially in the Iyyun material, see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 439 n. 174; Mark Verman, *The Books of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 39 n. 10.
23. For instance, in the thirteenth-century work *Ma'ayan ha-Ḥokhmah*, MS Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica ebr. 236, fol. 24b, the primordial flame is described as being "in the font until the point that there is no comprehension and no measure to the light that is

concealed in the surplus of the hidden darkness (*'orah ha-mit'alemet be-tosefet ha-ḥoshekh*)." See ibid., fols. 27b–28a: "From the primordial darkness . . . comes forth the existence of everything, and from it issues the spring . . . and it is called the light that is darkened from light (*'or haneḥshakh me-'or*) . . . for it is concealed, and it is impossible for the essence of the being of this darkness to be known. Therefore, it is called the darkness that darkens . . . for no creature can gaze upon it, even the angels that sit first in the kingdom of heaven. . . . The marvelous light (*ha-'or ha-mufla'*) receives the exchange from the light that is darkened from illuminating, and it is the principle of all the colors but there is no fixed color within it; it is like the violet, and everything is equal within it, for the darkness that emanates from the light is the *'alef*, as we have said, and this is the voice as it is articulated, which is called movement." For alternative translations of these passages, see Verman, *Books of Contemplation*, 51 and 59–60, and for discussion see 156–59.

24. *Sefer ha-'Emunot* (Ferara, 1556), 33a.
25. In *Gershom Scholem's Annotated Zohar* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 2490, Scholem reminded the reader that the zoharic language is based on Dan. 2:22.
26. *Zohar* 3:80b.
27. See Wolfson, "Left Contained in the Right;" idem, "Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar," *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988): 73–95.
28. *Zohar* 3:176a.
29. Gershom Scholem, "New Fragments From the Writings of R. Azriel of Gerona," *Memorial Book for Asher Gulak and Shmuel Klein* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1942), 207 (in Hebrew).
30. *'Avodat ha-Qodesh*, Ḥeleq Sitrei Torah, ch. 35, p. 523.
31. *Zohar* 3:129b, 135b, 137b.
32. *Zohar* 3:131a-b.
33. *Zohar* 3:127b.
34. Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, translated by Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 30.
35. *Zohar* 3:127b.
36. See below, n. 93.
37. *Zohar* 3:128a.
38. Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 46–47, contrasts the Torah of *Ze'eir 'Anpin* and the Torah of *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* on the basis that the former, which combines judgment and mercy, consists of the commandments, whereas the latter, which is pure mercy, points to an "antinomian strain" akin to the ancient Gnostic attitude to the Torah. Nevertheless, Liebes is of the opinion that the zoharic text "is not speaking here of supplanting the *Torah* with another, as is perhaps the case in *Ra'aya Meheimna* and *Tikkunei Zohar*; it speaks, rather, of deepening the *Torah* we possess and tempering it by means of a profound mystical vision." I am not certain that the more radical view is not implicit in the zoharic passage itself, although I would substitute the word "antinomian" with "hypernomian." The kabbalistic perspective on the Torah to be revealed in the messianic era is obviously indebted to earlier rabbinic sources, which may preserve even older traditions that influenced the attitude toward the law expressed in nascent Christian sources. See William D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come*, SBL Monographs 7 (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1952). Finally, it must be pointed out that already attested in classical rabbinic texts is the perception that divine forgiveness, related especially to the phenomenon of repentance, is an act that defies the logical consequences required by a system of reward and punishment. I will illustrate the point by mentioning one passage from *Pesiqta' Rabbati*, edited by Meir Friedmann (Vienna, 1880), 44:1, 183a. In a dictum attributed to R. Tanḥuma bar Abba, the unique quality of repentance is illustrated by the contrast of the power of God from that of the human being on the grounds that only the former can bring forth light from darkness. A basic law of physics, then and now, is that something can only come from something. To create light of darkness defies the logic that governs the pattern of existence, for it presupposes that something comes from nothing. Analogously, repentance is an absurdity that flies in the

face of the laws of jurisprudence. Just as we would not expect a person to kindle light from darkness, so we should not expect one to revoke a judgment of guilt. But repentance is predicated on the annulment of the decree that on rational grounds is completely justifiable. Human repentance is predicated on divine forgiveness, which in turn is based on the possibility that God will annul the standard of judgment mandated by the Torah. From this perspective we can appreciate the manner in which the kabbalistic doctrine is a sensitive elaboration rather than a radical distortion of the rabbinic idea.

39. See Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 34–43.
40. Ibid., 41. For other similarities between the messianic gathering of R. Simeon and the mystical fraternity in this zoharic text and the narrative accounts of Jesus and his disciples, see ibid., 171 n. 65, 174 n. 90, 180 n. 127, 191 n. 209.
41. There are moments in the present historical epoch that anticipate the messianic time. Thus, for example, in *Zohar* 2:88b, the second of the three festive meals on Sabbath, which is lunch on the day of Sabbath, is the banquet of *'Atiqa' Qadisha'*, for at that time this attribute of God is revealed "and all the worlds are joyous." In the same passage, the time of the afternoon service on Sabbath is described as a "propitious moment" *('et raṣon)* when the "will of wills is found and *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* reveals his will, and all judgments are subdued and desire and joy is found in everything." See also *Zohar* 3:16a: "It has been taught that when all actions below are proper and the mother [*Binah*] is joyous, *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* is revealed and the light is restored to *Ze'eir 'Anpin*, and everything is joyous, everything is perfect, everything is blessed, mercy is summoned, and all the worlds are joyous, as it is written 'He will return and he will love us, he will suppress our iniquities' (Micah 7:19). What is 'He will return'? *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* will return to be revealed in *Ze'eir*. He will return to be revealed for at first he was hidden, and everything is called repentance (*teshuvah*)." The mystical significance of repentance is the restoration of all the lower emanations to *Binah*, the divine mother who is called *teshuvah*, which activates the uppermost attribute of the divine, *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* to be illuminate *Ze'eir 'Anpin*. The disclosure of *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* from its state of concealment is thus depicted as another theosophic meaning assigned to the act of repentance. See Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1502. For discussion of the kabbalistic significance of *teshuvah*, especially in the zoharic corpus, see Shimon Shokek, *Repentance in Jewish Ethics, Philosophy and Mysticism* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 119–37 (in Hebrew); Elliot R. Wolfson, "Fore/giveness on the Way: Nesting in the Womb of Response," *Graven Images: Studies in Culture, Law, and the Sacred* 4 (1998): 153–69. See also Joseph Dan, *On Sanctity: Religion, Ethics and Mysticism in Judaism and Other Religions* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 402–34 (in Hebrew). On the relationship between *'Atiqa' Qadisha'* and *Ze'eir 'Anpin*, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Constructions of the Feminine in the Sabbatian Theology of Abraham Cardoso, with a Critical Edition of *Derush ha-Shekhinah*," *Kabbalah: A Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 3 (1998): 46–51.
42. *Zohar* 3:137b.
43. See Wolfson, "Constructions of the Feminine," 60–67.
44. The rabbinic expression, *beit din shaqul*, connotes a court made up of an odd number so that a decision can be rendered in the event that there is a split vote among the other judges. For instance, see Mishnah, Sanhedrin 1:6; Soṭah 9:1. In an obvious divergence from its original intent, Cordovero uses this expression to convey the idea of polarity based on judgment and mercy, the left and the right sides of the divine that emerge from a primordial state wherein the opposites coincide such that we can only speak of the one side that is entirely on the right.
45. *'Elimah Rabbati* (Brody, 1881), 67b-c.
46. This obvious point is raised by Judah Eidel, *'Afiqei Yehudah* (Lemberg, 1829), 36b.
47. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:13; *Exodus Rabbah* 4:3; *Midrash Tanḥuma'*, edited by Solomon Buber, Shemot, 12; Mishpaṭim 6.
48. This is the gist of the criticism of my position on gender in the kabbalistic symbolism offered by A. Elqayam, "On the 'Knowledge of Messiah'—The Dialectic of the Erotic Peak in the Messianic Thought of Nathan of Gaza," *Tarbiṣ* 65 (1996): 665 n. 107 (in

Hebrew). Elqayam challenges my understanding of the containment of the female in the male on the basis of the fact that gender is a correlative phenomenon, that is, if there is male, there is female. To be sure, according to our commonsense understanding of gender this is correct, but, according to the gender paradigm articulated in some of the major works of theosophic kabbalah (based on rabbinic precedent, as I argue here), there is a move beyond gender dimorphism to a monosexual model such that we can speak of maleness without an autonomous (i.e., ontically distinct) female counterpart. For more extended response to Elqayam's criticism, see Wolfson, "Constructions of the Feminine," 60–61 n. 153. Some of the sources cited in that context are repeated here.

49. A similar logic is described by Antoine Faivre, "Mystische Alchemie und Geistige Hermeneutik," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 42 (1973): 323–60.
50. Ḥayyim Vital, *Liqquṭim Ḥadashim*, edited by Daniel Touitou (Jerusalem, 1985), 63.
51. The exclusively masculine nature of the highest manifestation of the divine is also expressed by the idea that the aspect of *Malkhut* is not revealed at this level. See Ḥayyim Vital, *Mavo' She'arim* (Jerusalem, 1904), 28a.
52. *'Eṣ Ḥayyim* (Jerusalem, 1910), 6:5, 28a.
53. *Liqquṭim Ḥadashim*, 22–23.
54. I have rendered the expression *ṭov 'ayin* quite literally, but its idiomatic meaning is the one who is generous.
55. *'Emeq ha-Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1648), 15b.
56. The phallic implications of the supernal eye, which has no corresponding eye, are alluded to in another passage in *'Emeq ha-Melekh*, 35a. In that context, the verse, "The one of a good eye is blessed" (Prov. 22:9), is applied to Joseph who represents the "secret of *Yesod*, the holy covenant (*berit qodesh*)," for "he shines from the eye of *'Arikh*, the open eye, for there is naught but one eye there, and this is the secret of the five good essences that numerically equal [the word] *'ayin*. This is the secret of 'Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, who await for his grace' (Ps. 33:18)." Bachrach is here drawing on a much older motif in kabbalistic literature based on the phallic resonance of the uppermost gradation. On the eye and the phallus in kabbalistic symbolism, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through the Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 366 n. 143; idem, "Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth Century Jewish Mysticism," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, edited by John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 209–47, esp. 220–28.
57. Joseph Gikatilla, "The Final Section of *Sha'arei Ṣedeq*," in Ephraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, edited by Joseph Hacker (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 1976), 138 (in Hebrew).
58. *Sha'arei 'Orah*, 2:108–10, 197–98.
59. Ibid., 2:125–26.
60. Ibid., 1:233. For discussion of the position adopted by Gikatilla in his theosophic works in light of the philosophical orientation of his earlier works, see Asi Farber-Ginat, "'The Shell Precedes the Fruit'—On the Question of the Origin of Metaphysical Evil in Early Kabbalistic Thought," in *Myth and Judaism*, edited by Havivah Pedayah (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1996), 121–24 (in Hebrew).
61. *Sha'arei 'Orah*, 1:237. Compare the formulation in Gikatilla's *Le Secret du Marriage de David et Bethsabée*, edited and translated by Charles Mopsik (Paris: Éditions de L'Éclat, 1994), 42–43 (I have translated the Hebrew text from Mopsik's edition into English): "Know that the one who knows the secret of the supernal gradations and the emanation of the *sefirot* in the secret of that which overflows and that which receives, in the secret of earth and heaven and of heaven and earth, knows the secret of the bond of all the *sefirot* and the secret of all the created beings in the world, how they receive from one another. All of them receive the power of emanation, sustenance, subsistence, and vitality from the Lord, blessed be he. The one who knows this way knows the power in man through the performance of the 613 commandments and the rectification of the channels in all that overflows and receives."

62. *Sha'arei 'Orah*, 1:231. See ibid., 2:107.
63. The paradoxical confluence of the ancient and the novel—only that which has been eternally can come again in the incessant flow of time—is typical of mystical consciousness. The point was well expressed by Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, translated with an introduction by Marianne Cowan (South Bend: Gateway Editions, 1962), 50. In response to the question how Anaximander would account for the fact that there is still a process of coming-to-be even though an eternity of time has passed, Nietzsche wrote: "And from this question he can save himself only by a mystic possibility: eternal coming-to-be can have its origin only in eternal being; the conditions for the fall from being to coming-to-be in injustice are forever the same; the constellation of things is such that no end can be envisaged for the emergence of individual creatures from the womb of the 'indefinite.'" Here one can discern the seeds for Nietzsche's own doctrine of the eternal return of the same articulated in his later works. Many scholars have written about this seminal doctrine. As a representative sampling, see Joan Stambaugh, *Nietzsche's Thought of the Eternal Return* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, translated by David Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984); Peter Klossowski, "Nietzsche's Experience of the Eternal Return," in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, edited by David B. Allison (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977), 107-20, and a different translation of the same essay in idem, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, translated by Daniel W. Smith (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 55–73; Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, translated by J. Harvey Lomax, foreword by Bernd Magnus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Ned Lukacher, *Time-Fetishes: The Secret History of Eternal Recurrence* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 115–38.
64. For an altogether different reading of this verse that relates the blindness of Isaac to the augmentation of the power of judgment and the weakening of mercy, see *Zohar* 3:197a.
65. *Sha'arei 'Orah*, 1:252–53.
66. On the identification of this text, see Moshe Idel, "The World of Angels in Human Form," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 39 n. 145 (in Hebrew).
67. MS Vatican ebr. 456, fol. 16a. The influence of Gikatilla is also discernible in the description of the first emanation in the anonymous *Sefer ha-Shem*, which is printed in *Heikhal ha-Shem* (Venice, 1594), 6b, as "pure mercy without any admixture of judgment at all, to have compassion on everyone . . . the holy ancient One (*'atiqa' qadisha*) in the language of the *Zohar* of the Rashbi, according to the view that *Keter* is the *'Ein Sof*, and '*atiqa'* means primordial (*qadmon*), the elder (*zaqen*), for he is primordial to everything that is primordial, and thus he is filled with mercy."
68. Babylonian Talmud, Mo'ed Qaṭan 28a.
69. As Ben-Shlomo remarks in his edition of *Sha'arei 'Orah*, 1:162 n. 27, the citation that Gikatilla attributes to the rabbis is not known from any extant rabbinic source. Ben-Shlomo also observed that the precise expression in Hebrew is found in *Zohar* 3:134a (*'Idra' Rabba*) where it is transmitted in the name of R. Eleazar, the son of R. Simeon ben Yoḥai. The appearance of the same citation in the zoharic text and Gikatilla was already noted by G. Scholem, "Did Moses de Leon Compose the Zohar?" *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut* 2 (1926): 27 (in Hebrew). In the *Book of the Pomegranate*, 194, Moses de León similarly refers to the "great fate (*ha-mazzal ha-gadol*) upon which the Torah scroll is dependent." As I noted in the introduction to *Book of the Pomegranate*, 51–52, the symbolic interpretation of this dictum in Gikatilla parallels the zoharic usage, which differs from that of de León. For further comparison of Gikatilla, de León, and the *Zohar* on this topic, see Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 99–100.
70. *Sha'arei 'Orah*, 1:162.
71. Ibid., 163.
72. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated with commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), sec. 153, p. 90.

73. See above, n. 65.
74. On the talmudic notion of *lifnim mi-shurat ha-din* applied to human behavior, see Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 45b, Ketuvot 97a, Bava' Qama' 99b–100a, Bava' Meṣi'a' 24b, 30b; *Mekhilta' de-Rabbi Ishmael*, edited by Hayyim S. Horovitz and Israel A. Rabin (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1970), 198. For discussion of this rabbinic concept, see Aaron Lichtenstein, "Does Jewish Tradition Recognize An Ethic Independent of Halakha?" in *Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice*, edited by Marvin Fox (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), 69–80.
75. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 7a.
76. Babylonian Talmud, 'Avodah Zarah 7b.
77. *Sha'arei 'Orah*, 1:163.
78. Regarding this kabbalist, see Moshe Halamish, "R. Ya'aqov Ifargan and His Writings," *Pe'amim* 43 (1990): 85–110 (in Hebrew).
79. Haïm Zafrani, *Ethique et Mystique: Judaïsme en Terre d'Islam: Le Commentaire kabbalistique du "Traité des Pères" de J. Bu-'Ifergan* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1991), 167.
80. *Re'shit Ḥokhmah*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1984), Sha'ar ha-'Ahavah, ch. 8, 1:534.
81. For discussion of the history of this numerology, see Moshe Idel, "*Deus Sive Natura*—Les Métamorphoses d'une formule de Maïmonide à Spinoza," in *Maïmonide et la mystique juive* (Paris: Cerf, 1991), 105–34.
82. I have borrowed this formulation from J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 102: "Lawfulness without law provides, more concretely than the concept of judgement, a way of characterizing works of genius as the establishing of indeterminate schemata. Lawfulness now refers to the 'appearance of nature' thesis, while without law refers to transcendental opacity, the withdrawal of origin."
83. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 8–11. For a more recent discussion of the presumption that mystical experience is fundamentally amorphous and thus historically conditioned, see Jess Byron Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 75–93. A summary account of the main thesis of the book is given on p. 130: "Mystical experience is that amorphous, well-ordered, historically conditioned, trans-sensory metamorphosis of the waking consciousness that usually supervenes only after the individual has achieved recollectedness."
84. Gershom Scholem, *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time and Other Essays*, edited and selected with an introduction by Avraham Shapira, translated by Jonathan Chipman (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1997), 121.
85. The expression was used by Scholem in a letter to Benjamin dated 20 September 1934, in an effort to define the relationship to the law depicted in Kafka's *Trial*. See *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932–1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem, translated by Gary Smith and Andre Lefevere, with an introduction by Anson Rabinbach (New York: Schocken, 1989), 142. For discussion of this critical aspect of Scholem's religious nihilism, see Susan A. Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 49–51, 54, 89–91, 165.
86. The expression is derived from Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, translated by Harry Zohn (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), 72, cited and discussed by Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption*, 56.
87. The original German and partial English translation are found in David Biale, "Gershom Scholem's Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah: Text and Commentary," in *Gershom Scholem*, edited with an introduction by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 113–14. My rendering of the passage includes a part of the text not translated by Biale. For an analysis of Scholem's aphorisms, see also Joseph Dan, "Beyond the Kabbalistic Symbol," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 5 (1986): 363–85 (in Hebrew); and Peter Schäfer, "'Die Philologie der Kabbala ist nur eine Projektion auf eine Fläche': Gershom Scholem über die wahren Absichten seines Kabbalastudiums," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 5 (1998): 1–25, esp. 19–21.

88. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 19–24, 49–141; idem, "Der Nihilismus als religiöses Phänomen," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 43 (1974): 1–50, esp. 27–35. See also Scholem's formulation in *Walter Benjamin*, 136: "Benjamin was the first person I told about a very surprising discovery I had made: Sabbatian theology—that is, a messianic antinomianism that had developed within Judaism in strictly Jewish concepts." In this case, as it is with respect to many issues discussed by Scholem in his voluminous corpus, he is not always consistent as there are passages where he presents what he considers to be the antinomian element as oppositional to the tradition. Consider, for example, Scholem's observation, *Major Trends*, 318, that the Frankist doctrine of the holiness of sin and the conception that transgressive acts must be practiced with religious fervor "are radically opposed to everything which for centuries had formed the essence of moral teaching and speculation in Judaism. It is as if an anarchist rebellion had taken place within the world of Law." I do not think that the tension in Scholem can be resolved by arguing that in one passage he is speaking of Sabbatianism and in the other Frankism. It seems, rather, that Scholem genuinely contradicted himself, perhaps indicating to us implicitly that these matters defy a definitive and comprehensive clarification by historical/philological research.
89. *On the Kabbalah*, 119.
90. *Major Trends*, 21–22.
91. See Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 58–59. In that context, Scholem draws the explicit analogy between Paulinism and Sabbatianism. Analogies between key elements of the Sabbatian messianism and early Christianity, particularly as expressed in Paul, have been drawn elsewhere by Scholem and by a number of other scholars. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 307; idem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626–1676*, translated by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 282–86, 332–54, 545–48, 795–99; idem, *Messianic Idea*, 52, 123–25; Chaim Wirszubski, *Between the Lines: Kabbalah, Christian Kabbalah, and Sabbatianism*, edited by Moshe Idel (Jerusalem: Magnes press, 1990), 131; Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), 307 n. 11; Stephen Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 120. See also William D. Davies, "From Schweitzer to Scholem: Reflections on Sabbatai Ṣevi," in *Gershom Scholem*, 77–97; Eliezer Schweid, *Judaism and Mysticism According to Gershom Scholem: A Critical Analysis and Programmatic Discussion*, translated with an introduction by David A. Weiner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 82–86; Avraham Elqayam, "The Mystery of Faith in the Writings of Nathan of Gaza," Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1993, 213–20 (in Hebrew); idem, "Sabbatai Ṣevi's Manuscript Copy of the Zohar," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 3 (1998): 378–79 (in Hebrew); and, most recently, Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 205–6.
92. Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 61b.
93. Babylonian Talmud, Menaḥot 99a-b.
94. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 87a; Yevamot 62a; Bava Batra 14b; *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, edited by S. Schechter (Vienna, 1887), version A, ch. 2, pp. 9–10; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 5:13.
95. In his commentary to the relevant passage in the Babylonian Talmud, Menaḥot 99b, s.v., *shebiṭṭulah shel torah*, the eleventh-century exegete, Rashi (R. Solomon ben Isaac), explains that the nullification of the law consists of interrupting the study of Torah for the sake of performing altruistic acts of kindness such as accompanying the body of the deceased or going out to greet the bride. He who interrupts his study to accomplish such tasks receives the reward as if he were studying. In my judgment, the intent of the talmudic dictum is more radical than the explanation proposed by Rashi. The issue seems to me to be a more fundamental abrogation of the law, which is tellingly captured in the violent act of smashing the tablets.

96. Tosefta, Terumot 1:14; Ketubot 1:14; 12:1; Giṭṭin 3:8; Babylonian Talmud, Pesaḥim 82b; Ḥagigah 2b; Giṭṭin 40b; *Sifrei on Deuteronomy*, edited by Louis Finkelstein (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969), sec. 113, p. 173.
97. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 63a.
98. It is of interest to recall that Nietzsche perceived the "inversion of values," which constitutes a "grand style in morality," as the distinctive contribution of the Jews to European culture. See *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 195, p. 108, and sec. 250, p. 185. While Nietzsche surely was not cognizant of the passages in the rabbinic corpus that speak dialectically of fulfilling the law through its abrogation, I believe these very sources lend even greater support to his insight regarding the inversion that is so central to the Jewish ethos.
99. *Rabbenu Baḥya: Be'ur 'al ha-Torah*, edited by Ḥayyim D. Chavel, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1981), 2:459, ad Lev. 11:7.
100. *Be'ur 'al ha-Torah* (Venice, 1545), 137c.
101. The connection between the word *ḥazir*, "pig," and the verb *lehaḥazir*, "to restore," is found in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:9; *Leviticus Rabbah* 13:5, edited by Mordecai Margulies (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993), 295, and see n. 2, *ad locum*, for reference to other relevant sources.
102. Rainer M. Rilke, *Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus*, translated by A. Poulin Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), 92–93.
103. Perhaps Rilke's image of the attunement to the lyre as a trope for poetic inspiration is indebted to the statement of Heraclitus, "They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself: [it is] an attunement turning back [on itself], like that of the bow and the lyre." See Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 195. The Heraclitean notion of harmony, perhaps in response to Pythagorean ideas of music, involves agreement and disagreement, consonance and dissonance, coming together and coming apart. For further discussion, see ibid., 195–200, 284–85. Also relevant is the discussion of harmony as the "struggling-apart" in Martin Heidegger and Eugene Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67*, translated by Charles H. Seibert (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 158–59. The impact of Heraclitus on Rilke's notion of cosmic harmony is noted by Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, translated by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 132.
104. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 94–95.
105. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1986), 1056.
106. Ibid., 1057 (italics in original).
107. Ibid., 1069. On the power of music to broaden localized ritual experiences rather than exhibit a global ontology, see Philip V. Bohlman, "World Musics and World Religions: *Whose World?*" in *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*, edited by Lawrence E. Sullivan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 61–90.
108. Bloch, *Principles of Hope*, 1069. On the distinction between music, which is privileged as the most important form of art, and language, see the pertinent remarks of Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, translated by E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols. (Clinton, Mass.: Falcoln's Wing Press, 1958), 2: 447–57, esp. 448–49. On the contrast between music and language, see also Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World*, translated by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 67–69. Interestingly, Zuckerkandl (361) concluded that the critical difference for music between high and low tones does not fit into the quantitative or qualitative differences articulated by standard modes of linguistic discourse.
109. A similar point is made by Theodor Adorno's contrast of "intentional language" (*meinende Sprache*) and the "linguistic character" (*Sprachähnlichkeit*) of music: The former "tries to approximate but fails" since "the absolute slips away from every finite intention," whereas the latter "meets the absolute directly, but fails to communicate it." See Lambert

Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991), 127. On the language-character of music, see also Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 143–44. See below, n. 116.

110. This point was already noted by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Development of Humankind's Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen & Co,. 1911), 76–80.
111. *Principle of Hope*, 1062.
112. Jean-François Lyotard, *Toward the Postmodern*, edited by Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1993), 42.
113. Ibid., 46.
114. On the nexus between narrativity, music, and the transcendental beyond, see David R. Ellison, "Narrative and Music in Kafka and Blanchot: The 'Singing' of Josefine," in *The Place of Maurice Blanchot* [*Yale French Studies* 93], edited by Thomas Pepper (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 196–218.
115. The thesis is worked out must fully in Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1870–1871. For discussion of Nietzsche's theory of art, with particular reference to music, and his transvaluation of values, see Mihai I. Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 70–77.
116. Lyotard, *Toward the Postmodern*, 58. In a measure, the words of Lyotard reflect Nietzsche's insight regarding the origin of poetry in *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), sec. 84, pp. 138–40.
117. This insight was expressed in slightly different terms by Adorno who viewed the aesthetic form in general, and music in particular, as an expression of the negative dialectic that tradition is preserved through its being rejected. See H. Birus, "Adorno's 'Negative Aesthetics'?" in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 140–64, esp. 142–44.
118. For a richly nuanced discussion of the tension between speech and the ineffable, see Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
119. On the criterion of ineffability in the study of the mystical phenomenon, see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Modern Library, 1936), 371; Underhill, *Mysticism*, 79–80; William T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan Press, 1960), 55, 79, 89, 93, 111, 132, 252, 277–306; Steven T. Katz, "Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning," in *Mysticism and Language*, edited by Steven T. Katz (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3–41; Bimal Krishna Matilal, "Mysticism and Ineffability: Issues of Logic and Language," in *Mysticism and Language*, 143–57; and the study by Sells cited in the previous note. The intellectual background of the Neoplatonic tradition for the emphasis on apophasis in the history of Western Christian mysticism is explored in a striking way by Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in *Languages of the Unsayable*, 3–70. Derrida's essay was republished together with several other interpreting studies in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, edited by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992). For more general discussions of the role of the unspeakable in the study of religious experience, see Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *Ineffability: The Failure of Words in Philosophy and Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); George Kalamaras, *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension: Symbolic Form in the Rhetoric of Silence* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).
120. Michel Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside*, translated by Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 53.
121. Ibid.
122. Michel de Certeau, "History and Mysticism," translated by Arthur Goldhammer, in *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, edited by Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt (New York: New Press, 1995), 443.

123. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 27; idem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala," *Diogenes* 79 (1972): 61; *On the Kabbalah*, 22, 35–36, 52–53. For a representative sampling of scholarly discussions of Scholem's theory of symbolism in the kabbalistic material, see Nathan Rotenstreich, "Symbolism and Transcendence: On Some Philosophical Aspects of Gershom Scholem's Opus," *Review of Metaphysics* 31 (1977): 604–14; David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 90–92, 123–24; Schweid, *Judaism and Mysticism*, 42–43, 126–27; Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1988), 162–64; Ithamar Gruenwald, "Jewish Mysticism's Transition from Sefer Yeşira to the Bahir," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 30–36 (in Hebrew); Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London, 1988), 200–234; idem, "The Function of Symbols in G.G. Scholem," *Jewish Studies* 38 (1998): 43–72 (in Hebrew); Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption*, 76–77, 83–84, 104–15.

124. Gershom Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala," *Diogenes* 80 (1972): 165. Scholem's perspective on the apophatic nature of the mystical symbol has been repeated by Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy: Essays in Kabbalah and Sabbateanism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), 11–22 (in Hebrew); idem, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 285; and, more recently, by Dan, *On Sanctity*, 45–48, 77–80, 107, 108–30, 373–74, 382–83; idem, "The Name of God, the Name of the Rose, and the Concept of Language in Jewish Mysticism," *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996): 228–48, reprinted in Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism, vol. III: The Modern Period* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1999), 131–59.

125. It is possible to understand Wittgenstein's celebrated recognition of the limits of what can be said precisely in terms of the symbolic apprehension of the silence that lies beyond language, but which is apprehended only in dialectical relation to what is spoken. Consider, for example, the succinct account given by Gemma C. Fiumara, *The Symbolic Function: Psychoanalysis and the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 37: "A concern with the search for limits may be understood as the negative utterance (or establishment) of those vast expanses for which neither the language of science nor everyday language can find an expression possessed of sense. The very fact that there is, in Wittgenstein's thought, no explicit denial of the meaningfulness of forms of expression not provided for either in consensually accepted usage or by the governing of logic seems in itself a tacit recognition of an irrepressible human creativity. In other words, it is the unveiling of something else which will not be denied, which will not be nullified by any restrictive boundary: on the contrary, it is actually highlighted precisely because it is *other* than that which is contained within the limit itself." For a fuller discussion of the function of silence, see idem, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 95–112. On the mystical elements in Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy, see Russell Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language: A Study of Viennese Positivism and the Thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987); Frederick Sontag, *Wittgenstein and the Mystical: Philosophy as an Ascetic Practice* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). Wittgenstein's ideas regarding the limits of language are applied in an interesting way in Garry L. Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 8–30, 118–35.

126. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 11.

127. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword by Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81. Implicit in Lyotard's remarks is the reluctance to distinguish too sharply between modernity and postmodernity in terms of historical periodization, which he depicts as an obsession of modernity. See idem, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 25: "When this argument is applied to modernity, the result is that neither modernity nor so-called postmodernity can be identified and defined

as clearly circumscribed historical entities, of which the latter would always come 'after' the former. Rather we have to say that the postmodern is always implied in the modern because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself. . . . Modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity." See ibid., 34: "Postmodernity is not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features claimed by modernity, and first of all modernity's claim to ground its legitimacy on the project of liberating humanity as a whole through science and technology. But as I have said, that rewriting has been at work, for a long time now, in modernity itself." For a similar reservation with respect to the historical periodization, see Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, edited by Christie McDonald and translated by Peggy Kamuf (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 84.

128. Stephen D. Ross, *The Ring of Representation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 45. Concern with aporia has been a central focus of the philosophical reflections of Jacques Derrida as exemplified by his *Aporias*, translated by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).
129. *Ring of Representation*, 45–47.
130. The characterization of Kafka's understanding of truth as unrealizable and incommunicable in light of the fundamental paradox that marks the way of the kabbalistic orientation has been discussed by a number of scholars, including Scholem. See references given above n. 85 and below nn. 132–34. See also Scholem's remark in *Walter Benjamin*, 125: "I am reminded of one of my own statements, also from the thirties, that students of mine used to quote. Apparently I told them that in order to understand the Kabbalah, nowadays one had to read Franz Kafka's writings first, particularly *The Trial*." For a review of the scholarly discussion surrounding this issue, see Philip Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word: Cabala of the Renaissance* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 159–64. It is of interest to consider Kafka's description of his own work from his diary entry of 16 January 1922 as "an assault upon the border," which "might have developed quite easily into a new esoteric doctrine, a Kabbala." Text cited in Judith Glatzer Wechsler, "Eli Lissitzky's 'Interchange Stations': The Letter and the Spirit," in *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, edited by L. Nochlin and T. Garb (London, 1995), 190. From this passage it is evident that Kafka perceived an essential connection between esotericism (particularly of a Jewish form) and the attack on boundaries. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Karl Erich Grözinger, *Kafka and Kabbalah*, translated by Susan Hecker Ray (New York: Continuum, 1994).
131. My brief discussion of Kafka has benefited from the analysis in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 49–58.
132. See the letter of Scholem to Benjamin dated 9 July 1934 in the *Correspondence*, 122–23.
133. *Correspondence*, 126. On the correspondence between Scholem and Benjamin on Kafka, see Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption*, 47–55; Robert Alter, *Necessary Angels: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 3–23.
134. Scholem, *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism*, 193.
135. See above, n. 86.
136. Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, translated by Gary D. Mole (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 120.
137. Ibid., 122.
138. This is the title of the well-known essay by Scholem on the Sabbatian phenomenon included in the *Messianic Idea*, 78–141. For discussion of the intellectual background that may have fostered Scholem's orientation, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, "Defeating Evil from Within: Comparative Perspectives on 'Redemption through Sin,'" *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 37–57.
139. Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 1–84; Haviva Pedaya, "'Flaw' and 'Correction' in the Concept of the Godhead in the Teachings of Rabbi Isaac the Blind," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, no. 3–4 (1987): 157–220 (Hebrew).

140. *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (Jerusalem, 1990), 88.
141. The fifth of the ten sefirotic emanations.
142. The sixth of the ten sefirotic emanations.
143. *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, 83–84.
144. For fuller discussion of the theme of the eschatological transformation of evil into good in the writings of Luzzatto, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "*Tiqqun ha-Shekhinah*: Redemption and the Overcoming of Gender Dimorphism in the Messianic Kabbalah of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto," *History of Religions* 36 (1997): 303–13, and reference to other scholarly treatments given on 303 n. 55.
145. Abraham Galante, *Qol Bokhim* (Venice, 1589), 95a.
146. See above, nn. 99–101.
147. *Ḥoqer u-Mequbbal* (Lemberg, 1800), 22a. The transformation of the pig from an unholy to a pure animal is alluded to in Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Tefillot le-Ramḥal*, edited by Mordekhai Chriqui (Jerusalem: Éditions Ramhal, 1996), sec. 176, p. 153.
148. *'Iggerot Pitḥei Ḥokhmah wa-Da'at*, in *Sha'arei Ramḥal*, edited by Ḥayyim Friedlander (Bene Beraq, 1986), sec. 19, p. 376. Cf. ibid., sec. 54, p. 404: "The Emanator, blessed be his name, desires to reveal his unity . . . and every curse will be transformed into a blessing and all evil will change into good." Cf. *Tefillot le-Ramḥel*, sec. 253, p. 233.
149. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 211; *On the Kabbalah*, 66–70; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1101–8; Pinchas Giller, *The Enlightened Will Shine: Symbolization and Theurgy in the Later Strata of the Zohar* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 59–63.
150. *Zohar* 3:124b (*Ra'aya' Meheimna'*); *Tiqqunei Zohar*, edited by Reuven Margaliot (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook 1978), sec. 6, 23b–24a; *Zohar Ḥadash*, edited by Reuven Margaliot (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978), 94a (*Tiqqunim*). In the last passage, the redemptive quality of the *Zohar* is expressed as well in terms of the comparison of this treatise to the ark of Noah by which select human beings and animals were saved from the floodwaters. Regarding this image, see also *Zohar* 3:153b (*Ra'aya' Meheimna'*).
151. For references, see Wolfson, "Ontology, Alterity, and Ethics," 139 n. 31. The zoharic portrayal of non-Jews as beasts is based on rabbinic precedent. See Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 33–39.
152. *Zohar* 3:125a (*Ra'aya' Meheimna'*). See also *Zohar* 3:147a. In that context, the view that Israel comprises both human (*'adam*) and beast (*behemah*) is derived exegetically from the verse "man and beast you deliver, O Lord" (Ps. 36:6). On the demonic origin of the mixed multitude, the *'erev rav*, see *Zohar* 3:195a; *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 21, 53b.
153. *Zohar* 3:124b–25a (*Ra'aya' Meheimna'*). See Tishby, *Wisdom of Zohar*, 1108.
154. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 21, 53b: "It says with respect to Israel, 'Every boy that is born to you shall be thrown into the Nile' (Exod. 1:22). Light (*'or*) is the mystery (*raz*). The Nile is the partner of that light concerning which it says 'but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings' (ibid., 10:23). In this manner, in the final exile the *Zohar* contains the mystery, which is the light of the ultimate redemption, to fulfill [the verse] 'I will show him wondrous deeds as in the days when you went forth out of the land of Egypt' (Micah 7:15)." On the numerical equivalence of *raz* and *'or*, with specific reference to the secrets of the Torah to be revealed in the messianic era, see *Zohar Ḥadash*, 96c (*Tiqqunim*). For other references, see Wolfson, *Through the Speculum That Shines*, 375 n. 170.
155. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 34b; Sanhedrin 99a.
156. *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Melakhim 12:2.
157. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated with notes by Dennis Porter (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 177.
158. Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot*, 33–35.
159. My language here betrays the influence of Michel Foucault, "A Preface To Transgression," published in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard and translated by Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 29–52.

160. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Negative Theology and Positive Assertion in the Early Kabbalah," *Da'at* 32–33 (1994): v–xxii.
161. Babylonian Talmud, 'Eruvin 54a.
162. *Tiqqunei Zohar* 56, 91a; see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1104.
163. See Giller, *Enlightened Will Shine*, 81–121; Mopsik, *Grands textes de la cabale*, 207–11.
164. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 21, 52a.
165. Ibid., 53b.
166. Ibid., sec. 69, 119a.
167. Ibid., sec. 21, 53a.
168. Ibid., sec. 21, 51a.
169. A reference to the sixth emanation, which is also depicted as the king who unites with the matrona.
170. *Zohar* 2:119a (*Ra'aya' Meheimna'*).
171. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 21, 58a. On the impoverished state of both the ninth and tenth gradations, *Yesod* and *Malkhut*, see ibid., 45b. In that context, the displaced status of the phallic *Yesod* accounts for its name *bar*, which is related especially to the expression *nashshequ bar* in Ps. 2:12, whereas the feminine *Shekhinah* receives the name *barayta'*, the technical term for the tannaitic material found outside the canonical mishnah.
172. Ibid., 58a.
173. Ibid., 58b.
174. The symbolic reference is to the eighth and ninth gradations, *Neṣaḥ* and *Hod*, which are often depicted as the two legs or the two pillars of truth.
175. That is, the fourth and fifth gradations, *Ḥesed* and *Din*, which are depicted as the two arms of the divine anthropos.
176. In the Margaliot edition of which I have availed myself, a typographical error occurs here, for in place of the word kabbalah there appears halakhah, even though the expression "halakhah given to Moses at Sinai" was already applied to the *Shekhinah* in the first stage of the redemptive process when she rises to her feet to unite with the masculine potency. The obviously correct reading is "kabbalah given to Moses at Sinai," which I have restored based on other editions of the text including the first edition of *Tiqqunei Zohar* (Mantua, 1558), 61b.
177. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 21, 46a–b.
178. MS New York, Columbia University x893 z8, fol. 9a.
179. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 96b.
180. The Sabbatian understanding of the rabbinic name for the messiah, *bar niflei*, most likely reflects the interpretation of this name in *Zohar* 3:279a (*Ra'aya' Meheimna'*).
181. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi*, 798.
182. Babylonian Talmud, Makkot 24a.
183. See Elqayam, "Mystery of Faith," 34–48.
184. See reference in n. 181.
185. MS New York, Columbia University x893 z8, fol. 10a.
186. On the phenomenological resemblance between Paul and Sabbatianism, see references cited above, n. 91.
187. See Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Engenderment of Messianic Politics: Symbolic Significance of Sabbatai Ṣevi's Coronation," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, edited by Peter Schäfer and Mark R. Cohen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 203–58.
188. MS New York, Columbia University x893 z8, fol. 3b.
189. Ibid., fol. 10a.
190. Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Messianism*, translated by Batya Stein (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 106.
191. Ibid., 111.

CHAPTER FOUR

Above the Law: Mysticism and Antinomianism in the High Middle Ages

by Richard Woods, O.P.

IN THE FOREWORD to the revised edition of *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, Norman Cohn remarked that his earlier suggestion "that the story told in this book may have some relevance to the revolutionary upheavals of our own century" provoked considerable discussion, not all of it favorable.[1] But the passage of years has amply confirmed Cohn's modest proposal, not least in the wake of events such as the siege and self-destruction of the Branch Davidian compound at Waco, Texas, in 1993, and similar mass-suicide rituals from the holocaust at Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978, to those associated with the Order of the Solar Temple in Canada, Switzerland, and France in 1994 and 1995, and the collective immolations of California's Heaven's Gate cult in 1996.

As the third Christian millennium drew nearer (at least according to the faulty sixth-century chronology of Dionysius Exiguus), a variety of cults, sects, and movements began proliferating, some of them alarming in the violence of their rhetoric, if not behavior.[2] In the long view of history, such manifestations are not unusual. At critical moments in the past, millennial expectations commonly characterized evangelical movements and popular uprisings, some of which turned self-destructive. Many of these eruptions were characterized by an antagonism toward ordinary social conventions, institutions, and law, an attitude collectively if not always accurately categorized as "antinomian," that is, not merely illegal or even lawless, but opposed to law in principle, most often in the name of religious or spiritual liberty.[3]

During the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, an exceptional flourishing of mystical spirituality in western Europe so closely paralleled an upsurge in radical and eventually violent antinomian activity, often energized by millenarian

yearnings, that the two came to merge, at least in the eyes of church and civil authorities.[4] But did distinct groups of mystical antinomians (or, perhaps more accurately, "antinomian mystics") really exist as Ronald Knox, Norman Cohn, and other historians affirm? Or were sects such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit largely fantastic constructions in the minds of medieval authorities, as scholars such as Jeffery B. Russell and others claim?[5]

Untangling the knotty problem of mystical antinomianism first of all requires identifying and distinguishing the major strands of mysticism and antinomianism in the late Middle Ages and then determining the extent to which they formed a new configuration or, alternatively, were merely confused with one another, whether by church and state officials or by chroniclers and historians both then and now. For instance, it is at least plausible that fundamentally orthodox mystics such as Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart, all of whom were accused of fomenting heresy and discord, may have actually exerted a restraining influence on the antinomian sentiments of an increasingly restless population by channeling some of the restless religious energy of the period into social and self-transcendence.[6] Reciprocally, however, the very real antinomianism of radical members of new religious movements, fired by millenarian and political expectations as well as antagonism toward civil and ecclesiastical institutions, seems to have compromised the reputation of such mystics, in some cases fatally so, by appealing their authority. In any case, the increasingly draconian reaction of church and state authorities to all forms of antinomianism from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries also entailed a repudiation of the high mysticism of the period, a move that most likely intensified rather than diminished the social and religious uprisings of that and succeeding eras as well as stifling one of the most creative religious movements of Western history.

In the first part of this chapter, I contend that given real instances of mystically influenced antinomianism in the Middle Ages, orthodox mystics such as Marguerite Porete, at least many of the beguines of the period, and Meister Eckhart differed not only really but deliberately from the radical dissenters, but were confused by the authorities with their ideological opponents because of a shared rejection of conventional moral and spiritual norms. Closer inspection reveals, however, that beneath a superficial similarity, two entirely dissimilar sets of values were at work: an ethic of social transcendence based on universality and compassion *versus* an ethic of social deviance based on group survival and self-interest. In the concluding part, I consider some proposals from social theory and moral development that might account for this differential pattern of mystical and antinomian doctrine and praxis in the late Middle Ages.

Medieval Antinomianism and Mysticism

Mystical currents ran early and deep within early Christianity, fed from both Jewish sources and contact with beliefs and practices widespread in the Hellenic

era, especially those associated with Middle- and Neoplatonism.[7] Such spirituality was, however, keenly and consistently opposed to forms of dissent now construed as antinomianism and often associated with millenarianism are reprobated in the earliest Christian writings.[8] During the second century, orthodox writers such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Alexandria also inveighed against Gnostic Christian sects antagonistic toward both the Jewish Torah and law in general, from the Carpocratians, Adamites, Cainites, and Ophites, to the learned and nuanced rejection of the Law in toto by Marcion and his followers.

In the following period, divisive episodes of intense fervor, often coupled with both millenarianism and rigorous asceticism, accompanied the rise of Montanism and Donatism as well as more "orthodox" outbursts associated with conciliar disputes or charismatic figures such as the Stylites and Saint Martin of Tours. Early in the fourth century, a mysterious and ill-defined group known as Messalians arose in Syria practicing (it was alleged) a low asceticism, mendicancy, sexual promiscuity, and devil worship. At the very end of that century, Priscillian, the charismatic bishop of Ávila, was accused of antinomian beliefs and behavior, for which he and several of his disciples were executed by imperial decree.[9] But it was not until the High Middle Ages that a suspected confluence of antinomian and mystical tendencies generated by the sweeping movement known as the *Vita Apostolica* led to the escalation of disasters that climaxed in the early Reformation period.

By then, antinomianism had achieved sufficient recognition to be considered a distinct kind of aberration and was named and analyzed as well as vehemently opposed by both Protestant and Catholic officials. Further, the high mystical element that had been so prominent in the medieval period had been succeeded by a more doctrinaire, often overtly political spirit, exacerbated by religious warfare and tinged by episodes of individual madness and antisocial mania. What Ronald Knox designated "enthusiasm" had emerged in visible and potent form.[10] My interest lies less in these later episodes of militant antinomianism, which have been thoroughly discussed in the relevant literature, but rather in the confluence of mystical and antinomian elements during the preceding era that prefigured them.

From the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, western Europe witnessed a number of mass movements such as the Children's Crusades, the Peoples' Crusades, the uprisings of the *Pastoureaux* and the *Jacquerie* in France, the English Peasants' Revolt (Wat Tyler's Revolt) in 1381, and sporadic outbursts of rebellion by Caputiati, flagellants, and other groups.[11] These and other reactionary events evinced growing discontent among the populace as the fabric of medieval society began to unravel. But while related by common themes, including oppressive taxation, famine, and apocalyptic expectation, they were largely unconnected and, although often inspired by doctrinaire pronouncements of charismatic leaders, generally devoid of defined spiritual content or theoretical articulation.

A significant instance of a different stripe occurred, however, in the mid-thirteenth century in an area of southern Germany known as the Swabian Ries.[12] As reported by Saint Albert the Great and other prominent theologians, the movement was not a sect but a sentiment—ideas and related practices fostered by the exhortations of itinerant preachers promoting what was called the "new spirit," an amalgam of mystical and eschatological notions incorporating elements of Joachism, erotic Catharism, and antinomian attitudes. No evidence, however, suggested widespread organization or systematic belief. Many of the adherents appear to have been peasants imbued with the religious fervor of the time and were treated with surprising leniency.[13]

The "mystical" element in the beliefs of the dissenters of the Swabian Ries involved inchoate notions of personal deification attained through human effort. They were also anticlerical, distrusting and rejecting the spiritual guidance of the clergy, and tended to repudiate the sacramental system, the ordained priesthood, and the cloistered life. They were crudely pantheistic and morally indifferent[14]—all elements that would in a short time characterize accusations brought against Fraticelli, "Free Spirits," and other radicals. Although apparently singular, this upsurge of dissidence in southern Germany nevertheless indicates that nascent mystical views had already merged with certain antinomian attitudes in the popular and perhaps ecclesiastical mind.

More disturbing developments were taking place within the halls of learning, as mystical ideas recently inherited from Eastern Christianity made a deep and lasting impression on the new intelligentsia of Paris and other urban centers of learning. Now provided with theory, a spiritual revolution was in the making.

The pivotal figure in the thirteenth century was an esteemed lecturer in logic and theology at the University of Paris, Amaury of Bène, who enjoyed both royal patronage and intellectual influence. Impressed by Eriugena's development of ancient Christian Neoplatonic ideas, notably those of Origen, Amaury taught a form of mystical pantheism that led to accusations of error and eventual disgrace. He died in 1207, but his doctrine was perpetuated by a handful of disciples who were quickly labeled Almaricians (or Amaurians). Unlike their master, they were not only prosecuted, but in 1210 many of them were executed.[15] Apparently among the errors of the Almaricians, if not Amaury himself, were a number of allegedly antinomian tenets.[16]

Amaury's teachings were banned by the University of Paris and condemned at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. In succeeding decades, real or imagined signs of nascent Almaricianism were ruthlessly purged. In 1225 even the great work of Eriugena that had inspired Amaury was condemned by the Council of Sens.[17] But his ghost would continue to haunt the later Middle Ages, not least in the teachings of the most notorious movement of the period excepting only Catharism, the so-called heresy of the Free Spirit. Medieval mysticism and antinomianism

had met, and in these two instances, married. But why had they come together in the first place?

Mystical Revolutionaries: New Religious Movements in the Middle Ages

Two developments are of critical importance in understanding the emergence of new religious movements, including antinomian sects, in the High Middle Ages and much of the subsequent era. First, beginning in the eleventh century, the paradigm of the "apostolic life" of the early and therefore presumably definitive Christian community shifted from monastic forms to the life of the canons regular and, finally, to the laity and the new mendicant orders. This move corresponded in many respects to the replacement of feudalism by new social structures reflecting the increasing importance of the bourgeoisie and a money economy centered on urban activity rather than agriculture.[18] The second development was sudden manifestation of a widespread and intense mystical spirit.

Accompanying but not coextensive with the *Vita Apostolica*, this quest for experiential contact with God arose from several sources. Principal among them was a widespread desire among well-educated members of the aristocracy and rising middle classes no longer content with merely institutional observance to deepen the spiritual life. Another factor involved the expanding world of scholarship itself, as ancient texts and manuscripts were "discovered" and translated from the Greek, including many mystical texts of Neoplatonic provenance from the early Christian era, particularly the Pseudo-Dionysian writings with their strong apophatic emphasis, coupled with a renewed interest in Augustinian illuminism.[19] The simultaneous appearance of such mystical notions alongside growing antinomian tendencies among the new middle class seem to have endowed the latter with a religious legitimization that both secular and ecclesiastical authorities quickly recognized as dangerous in the extreme, striking as it did, at least potentially, at the dual root of imperial Christendom.[20] Moreover, such sentiments were becoming increasingly popular among women.

Upward Bound: Medieval Women

In the twelfth century, outstanding monastic figures such as Hildegard von Bingen and a flock of Cistercian abbesses began more or less successfully to resist efforts by male members of their orders to control and restrict their lives. As the new religious movement spread to the rising urban classes, the sense of a distinct role for women grew apace. Moreover, far from being refugees from the ranks of the poor and dispossessed envisioning new religious communities as a way to advance themselves materially, the great majority of those who became beguines or joined the mendicant orders were daughters of middle- and upper-class families enjoying a world of prosperity and luxury unseen since the late Roman Empire.

Although in open revolt against this new economy of money and power, these young women, like their male counterparts, were cultured and well-educated.

Soon forbidden by church law to beg on the streets like mendicant friars and radical sectarians, the beguines supported themselves by handcrafts and social service. They copied books, wove cloth, made lace, kept house, and used whatever earnings were left after supporting themselves to alleviate the needs of the poor and sick. Some of the most famous beguines were poets, such as Hadewijch of Antwerp and, in some measure, Mechthild of Magdeburg. Others wrote songs, prose treatises, and tutored the children of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie.[21]

It was among these well-educated, devout beguines that the new mystical spirit especially took root. In their lives and writings, the elements of Cistercian love-mysticism associated with St. Bernard of Clairvaux were interwoven with themes of voluntary poverty and Neoplatonic deification to create new patterns of spiritual aspiration. In quest of directors and confessors similarly attuned to themes of radical poverty, learning, and union with God, the beguines found natural allies in the new mendicant orders, especially the Dominicans and Franciscans. By the end of the thirteenth century, a network of beguine mystics extended from the Netherlands into France and along the Rhine valley deep into Switzerland. Letters, poems, and prose manuscripts were passed from house to house, while itinerant preachers exchanged news as they traveled along the trade routes of Europe.

Although favored early in the thirteenth century by astute bishops such as Jacques de Vitry as well as monarchs such as Louis IX and the mendicant orders, by the end of the century the beguine movement passed under a cloud of suspicion as the hierarchy grew more wary of the proliferation of sects and cults operating with minimal ecclesiastical control or wholly outside the bounds of the church. The conviction was spreading that tares had not only appeared among the wheat, but had engulfed it.

Reaction

Toward the end of the twelfth century, the quest for evangelical simplicity and union with God also began to assume the form of more radically alternative religious expressions as it encountered exotic religious ideas and practices emanating from southeastern Europe. Many of these doctrines and ways of living were imported by travelers and missionaries during and after the Crusades, especially those from Bulgaria, where dualistic notions associated with Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism (i.e., Messalianism) had infiltrated Christianity many centuries before.

Soon enough, these Cathars, Bogomils, or Albigensians, as they were variously known, were perceived even by other adherents of the *Vita Apostolica* as a heretical sect. Lay preachers led by Peter Valdes (or Waldo), a merchant of Lyon, began to oppose the Cathars but became suspect themselves because they lacked authorization from the bishops. Despite the efforts of a preaching tour led, first, by Cistercian

abbots acting as papal legates, then the less ostentatious mission of Bishop Diego of Ozma and his companion, the young Saint Dominic, the heretics remained largely unmoved. Gradually, the situation became more and more explosive, culminating in the ruthless crusade against the Albigensian Cathars led by Simon de Montfort in 1208 following the assassination of one of the papal legates.

By the second decade of the thirteenth century, the tide of favor was also beginning to turn against the new religious movement, especially the beguines (and their male counterparts, the *beghards*) who did not live within an enclosure, but still preferred to wander from place to place and beg rather than earn their support. At this time, ecclesiastical and royal concern with antinomian movements, particularly the so-called Free Spirit, also became acute. Soon enough, intimations that the beguines had been infiltrated by Catharism and the doctrine of the Free Spirit were circulating among the bishops.[22]

At midcentury, William of St. Amour, the archconservative who had led the attack of the secular masters at the University of Paris against the Dominicans and Franciscans, turned his formidable attention to the beguines and beghards when his earlier campaign was deflected by papal intervention. But even the mendicant orders themselves, whose friars had been drawn to the beguines as spiritual directors and protectors (and sometimes disciples), grew more critical of the wandering beguines. Humbert of Romans, the fifth Master of the Dominican Order and a man justly famous for his wisdom and balance, prepared for the Council of Lyon in 1274 a cautionary statement concerning relations between the mendicants and the beguines. The minister general of the Franciscans prepared a similar memorial for the council warning of the "heretical peril among the beguines."[23]

It is with this juxtaposition of concerns that the fatal link between antinomianism and mysticism was forged in the minds of the hierarchy, who between the Second Lateran Council in 1215 and the Council of Vienne in 1311–12 completed a *volte-face* in regard to the new religious movement. The most prominent targets of ecclesiastical ire in this regard appear to have been Marguerite Porete (executed in 1310), the beguines and beghards condemned at Vienne in 1312, and Meister Eckhart (twenty-eight propositions from whose works were condemned or reprobated in 1329). Scores of other women and men were persecuted and often executed as heretics during this period and after, notably by the Archbishops of Cologne and Strassburg. Nevertheless, the cases of Porete, the condemned beguines, and, to a lesser degree, Eckhart, offer the clearest insight into how the confusion of mystical and antinomian notions led to calamity.

Condemnation: The Pattern of Medieval Heresy

Ronald Knox usefully and briefly summarized five elements of "enthusiasm" that he thought typified not only the militant antinomians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but their medieval and even earlier precursors: otherworldliness,

alternations of rigorism and antinomianism, selective impeccability, and irrationalism. Among secondary characteristics, Knox included millenarianism and ecstasy, "under which heading I include a mass of abnormal phenomena, the by-products, it would seem, of prophecy, or sometimes of 'convincement.'"[24] Herbert Grundmann stated, additionally, that the radical medieval *apostolici* worked to support themselves rather than beg, held property in common, opposed killing, oaths, tithes, "works of devotion," sacraments, the priesthood, and the hierarchy. Many also claimed to have attained a state of sinlessness and erotic freedom because of spiritual perfection. Some claimed that matter was evil, that God was not the Creator of the world, and that it was possible through mystical identification with Christ to become one with God.[25] Dissenters were also accused of offering prayers to the devil, holding ritual orgies, and murdering children, whose ashes were used for magic[26]—charges that would in time be made, of course, against Jews, witches, and other suspected subversives.

Of all these characteristics, which are easily identified among various radical dissenters described by Cohn, Leff, Lerner, Russell, and other historians, only four are found in the writings of Porete, Eckhart, and the beguines such as Hadewijch of Antwerp, Beatrix of Nazareth, and Mechthild of Magdeburg: otherworldliness, relative impeccability, irrationalism (in that love is extolled over reason), and ecstasy, which is greatly reduced in Porete and virtually ignored by Eckhart.[27] Rigorism, antinomianism, and millenarianism are notably absent.

Other important differences become evident between the views of the peasants of the Swabian Ries, the Almaricians, and the proponents of the Free Spirit on one hand, and expressions of high mystical consciousness by Marguerite Porete or Meister Eckhart on the other, once the theological nuances and context of their respective positions are considered. This, however, the judges in Paris and Avignon were unable (or unwilling) to do, being supplied only isolated statements torn from their supporting context. This was perhaps especially true in the case of Marguerite Porete.[28]

Marguerite Porete: The Cost of Integrity

Grundmann points out that after Porete's execution,

> A contemporary chronicler [William of Nangis] reproduces the condemned doctrine in different wording, perhaps to make [the propositions] clearer to his readers, and only then does he demonstrate the close alliance of this mystical speculation with love-mysticism on the one hand, and with the antinomianism of the mystical experience of God on the other. When chroniclers or inquisitorial protocols attempt to describe the propositions of heretics, this mystical doctrine is always distorted and confused, as if it sought to break down all barriers against

> compulsion and vice. [But] When we have even a few words from the mouth of a "heretic" such as Margaret Porete, it is mystical earnestness and religious purity which speak from them.[29]

Robert Lerner observes, similarly, that William's account "tries, like the first article from the *proces-verbal*, to portray her as an antinomian. . . . Perhaps the error related in the chronicle was even a direct citation of another extracted article . . . [which] runs that 'the annihilated soul' can 'grant to nature all that it desires without remorse of conscience.'"[30] But Lerner is quick to add that Marguerite immediately qualifies her seemingly antinomian remark, explaining "that because of the soul's miraculous transformation nature 'is so well ordered' that it 'does not demand anything prohibited.'" Thus, "it may be said that while [her doctrine] reveals Marguerite Porete to have been the first identifiable Free Spirit, it does not advocate antinomianism and presents a thoroughly different picture of her thought than the Inquisition would have wished left to posterity."[31]

The list of condemned propositions attributed to Porete by the Paris inquisition has been lost. But in the hypothetical reconstruction by Edmund Colledge and Romana Guarnieri based on glosses by an anonymous English Carthusian, several focus on themes that if not actually antinomian, are remarkably independent in spirit. Others allude to the futility of works and impeccability:[32]

> Art. III: That the soul is naturally blessed by the gift of God, and has no need of Scripture or understanding or intellect to attain to full knowledge of him.
>
> Art. IV: That the soul brought to nothing in the love of her creator neither desires or rejects poverty or tribulation, Masses or sermons, fasting or prayers.[33]
>
> Art. VII: That the soul should save itself by faith without works.
>
> Art. IX: That the soul which has true freedom does nothing which could injure its inward peace, not in obedience to anyone.
>
> Art. X: That the soul can have a constant vision of the divine nature in this present life.
>
> Art. XI: That souls brought to nothing in union with God must not labor to acquire virtues.
>
> Art. XIII: That souls which are truly free are in no danger of sinning.

When not outright distortions, such tenets (assuming that they might represent doctrine not found in the *Mirror*) only superficially resemble teachings of the Free Spirit as interpreted by Knox, Lerner, and others. On other issues, Porete

actually opposed them. Ellen Babinsky argues, "The centerpiece of the Free Spirit perspective seems to be that arduous ascetic practice was necessary to attain the divine life of union with God. In this view, only through extreme purgation could one divest the self of all will and desire in order to attain perfection."[34] Here, Porete differs strikingly, for she advocates a relative sinlessness achieved not by works, which she repudiates, but because of pure receptivity to God's presence, which is to say, grace. Further, as in Eckhart's teaching, Porete's notion of impeccability simply means freedom from guilt because of former sin, now forgiven, and imperviousness to the attraction of sin because of close union with God. In chapter 41, she writes,

> such a Soul has no anxiety from sin which she might have ever committed, nor hope in something which she might be able to do, but only in the goodness of God. And the secret treasure of this goodness alone so annihilates her within herself that she is dead to all feeling from within and without, to the extent that such a Soul no longer does any works, neither for God's sake nor for her own.[35]

In chapter 47, Porete also affirms that

> neither she nor any other understands the nothingness of her horrible sins and faults, compared to what is in the knowledge of God about them. Such a Soul, says Love, has retained no will, but instead has arrived at and fallen into willing nothing and the certain knowledge of knowing nothing. And this knowing-nothing and willing-nothing have released and freed her. Such a Soul, says Love, maintains the counsel of the Gospel which says: "Have a simple eye and then you will not sin."[36]

Stripped of its author's identity, for hundreds of years after her death Porete's book was considered orthodox by learned monks, both Carthusian and Benedictine, and by orthodox scholars of mysticism, such as Evelyn Underhill. How and why her doctrine was perceived as antinomian in her time is, however, not so much a mystery as it is a testament of the deepening suspicion of the times and a growing confusion between transcendence and deviance.

The Suppression of the Beguines

The suspicions of church and civil rulers that antinomianism permeated the Free Spirit movement and, in particular, many communities of beguines and beghards, came to a head at the Council of Vienne in 1311–12. Several of the

judges who had declared against Porete were numbered among those present, including Berengar of Landorra, soon to become Master of the Dominican Order, and Jacques Fournier, who became head of the theological commission that judged Eckhart in Avignon fifteen years later, and eventually succeeded to the papacy as Benedict XII. Also present were a number of bishops under the sway of King Philip IV, under whose aegis Porete was burned and who eventually appeared at the council in person and exerted force to assure the outcome he desired.

One of the main sources of the bishops' long examination of the errors of the beguines and beghards was Porete's book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Even though the first mention of a sect of the "free Spirit" cannot be dated before 1311, the heresy had assumed large proportions by the end of the council.[37] The decree *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus*, issued shortly afterward, ordered that henceforward all beguines should live in communities under strict supervision. A second decree, *Ad nostrum,* synopsized and condemned the doctrine of the Free Spirit, instructing bishops and inquisitors to proceed against any beghards and beguines who were discovered to hold such views.

Not surprisingly, *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus* condemned at least the so-called wandering beguines in terms strongly reminiscent of the accusations against Marguerite Porete:

> There are certain women, commonly called beguines who, although they promise no one obedience and neither renounce property nor live in accordance with an approved rule, and consequently can in no wise be considered regulars. . . . [S]ome of them, as if possessed with madness, dispute and preach about the Highest Trinity and divine essence and in respect to the articles of faith and the sacraments of the Church spread opinions that are contradictory to the Catholic faith. They deceive many simple persons in these things and lead them into various errors; they also do and commit under the veil of holiness much else which endangers their souls.[38]

The second decree, *Ad nostrum*, was not only more detailed, but evidently drew on much wider sources while still reflecting the *Mirror of Simple Souls*. Ernest McDonnell constructed a list of the errors attributed to the heretical beghards and beguines based on a variety of contemporaneous sources, most of them either hostile accounts or items extracted from confessions.[39] These he has compared with the items enumerated in *Ad Nostrum*:

> I. Man can attain in his present life such a degree of perfection that he will be rendered completely incapable of sinning and will no longer be

> able to make progress in divine grace. For they say, if a person can perfect himself indefinitely, he might in time become more perfect than Christ.
>
> II. After attaining the highest degree of perfection, a person will have no more need of fasting or praying because the senses are now so completely subject to the control of the soul and reason that the body may be granted absolute liberty.
>
> III. Those who have achieved this state of perfection and absolute freedom of spirit are no longer subject to obedience and law or obligated to follow ecclesiastical regulations, for where divine spirit rules, there is liberty.
>
> IV. Man is able to achieve in the present life the same blessedness that he will possess in life eternal.
>
> V. Every rational being is in himself by his very nature blessed. The soul therefore has no need of the divine light to behold God and to enjoy him in bliss.
>
> VI. Virtuous acts are necessary only for the imperfect person; but the perfect soul no longer has need of virtues.
>
> VII. Sexual intercourse is not a sin as long as nature demands it, especially if the person who indulges is strongly tempted, but when nature does not dictate it becomes a mortal sin.
>
> VIII. It is not necessary to rise when the body of Jesus is presented in divine service or otherwise to show respect to the host, for it would be a sign of imperfection to come down from the heights of pure contemplation to dwell on thoughts of the eucharist or the passion of the Savior.[40]

McDonnell comments,

> The pronouncement of eight specific errors which harmonize with Free Spirit doctrine had the practical result of associating the conduct and metaphysics of orthodox beghards and beguines, above all in Belgium, with those professing pantheism. These errors all resolve into the one cardinal doctrine: man can attain in this life complete perfection and in this state, which renders him incapable of sin, he can dispense with fasts, prayers, good works, and all ecclesiastical prescriptions.[41]

The same suspect doctrines are, of course, similar to those attributed to Meister Eckhart in Cologne and at his trial in Avignon: deification construed as panthe-

istic identification with God, impeccability, and a repudiation of virtuous works and allegiance to the institutions of the church.

Although the instructions were confused and perplexing, persecution of beguines and beghards soon began in earnest. In 1317, while Meister Eckhart was living in Strassburg, Archbishop John of Dürbheim began a systematic inquisition, the first in Germany. On pain of excommunication, beguines and beghards were forbidden to wear their habits, and the populace was not allowed to give alms to those so clad. Many beguine houses were confiscated, suspect literature seized, and public begging outlawed. The Archbishop pursued fugitives into neighboring dioceses and urged his fellow bishops to follow his example.

Within a few years, the movement seems to have gone underground, where it survived for decades. The next attack came in Cologne, where in 1322 Archbishop Henry von Virneburg, the nemesis of the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit, and eventually of Eckhart himself, summoned another synod to deal with the problem. By the end of 1327, more than fifty Brethren of the Free Spirit had been executed, including their leader, a charismatic figure named Walter of Holland. It was in the midst of this wide-ranging inquisition that Eckhart was accused and tried for heretical teaching.

The Attack on Eckhart

The case against Eckhart proceeded differently from those of the majority of men and women accused of heresy, as he was protected to some degree by his status as a priest, friar, doctor of theology, and perhaps the greatest preacher of his day. Yet it is significant that the majority of propositions extracted from his works and ultimately condemned by the papal commission in Avignon in 1329 resemble the teachings of Marguerite Porete with regard to union with God, impeccability, radical spiritual poverty, and freedom from the necessity of works.[42]

Although Eckhart's extant works are also devoid of antinomian ideas and he in fact exhorts his hearers to remain faithful to their religious duties, his name was associated with less orthodox tracts, such as *Swester Katrei*, that have a more distinct antinomian tone. Other manuscripts of the time, most now lost, similarly linked Eckhart to a variety of radical sectarians. It is not without relevance that Nicholas of Basle, the last of the leaders of the Friends of God, the informal circle of Rhineland mystics that developed around Eckhart's disciples, was executed for heresy at Vienna in 1409. But Eckhart himself remained within the pale of orthodoxy, as his immediate disciples believed and modern scholarship has confirmed. Nevertheless, twenty-eight propositions absracted from his works were condemned or reprobated by papal decree in 1329.

Eckhart undeniably and vociferously taught a doctrine of mystical transformation into God that amounts to deification. In this, he drew on ancient Neoplatonic Christian tradition, both hallowed and orthodox, if out of phase

with the *devotio moderna* beginning to develop at the time.[43] Similarly, he believed that insofar as one had attained union with God, sin had become an impossible option. At Avignon, for instance, Eckhart defended himself by claiming that "A perfect man, knowing that God has willed and wills him to have sinned, in loving God's honor wills that he had sinned, but ought not will sin for the sake of anything that is beneath God. He also knows that God would not permit him to sin if it were not for his own betterment."[44] For Eckhart, as for Porete and the orthodox beguines, such impeccability was always relative and the effect of grace.

Like Porete, Eckhart also exhorted his followers to rise beyond the ordinary practice of virtue, not to abandon it: "[A]ll virtues should be enclosed in you and flow out of you in their true being. You should traverse and transcend all the virtues, drawing virtue solely from its source in that ground where it is one with the divine nature."[45] Such moral transcendence is, moreover, not a feat of human will, but the effect of divine grace, of the surrender of willing:

> Even the very light in which [the soul] is atoned would be spurned by the soul if she did not know for certain that she received God in that light, for she rejects everything that is not God in Himself for God leads His bride right out of all the virtues and nobility of creaturehood into a desert place in Himself, and speaks Himself in her heart, that is, He makes her like Himself in grace.[46]

In all of this, however, Eckhart nowhere espouses teachings that can be called antinomian. Like Porete's condemnation, his remains a mystery only insofar as the reasons why he was associated with radical dissenters elude immediate perception. There can be little doubt, however, that this, rather than actual heretical teaching, is why Eckhart became suspect and his doctrine was condemned.

Aftermath

Despite Porete's execution, the conciliar condemnations of 1312, the vigorous persecutions of 1317 and 1322, and the condemnation of Eckhart's doctrine in 1329, the *Vita Apostolica* endured. Cells of Rhenish beghards were unearthed in 1335 and again in 1339. Cohn remarks that

> In 1353 Pope Innocent VI was so alarmed by the renewed activity of the heretical Beghards that he appointed the first papal inquisitor in Germany and ordered the secular authorities to assist this man and to put their prisons at his disposal. In 1356 an adept who had come from Bavaria to the Rhine valley was arrested for teaching the Free Spirit and was burnt at Speyer. A year later the Archbishop of Cologne was again complaining that heretics were so numerous that they might well

> contaminate the whole of his flock. In the last decade of the century an important heresiarch, Nicholas of Basle, won a following along almost the whole length of the Rhine from Constance to Cologne. Followers of his were burnt at Heidelberg and Cologne; and he himself, after several times defeating the efforts of the inquisitors to convict him, was caught at Vienna and burnt.[47]

Scholarly opinion has varied with regard to whether the Heresy of the Free Spirit was in fact a real if loosely organized brother- and sisterhood or largely a delusion engendered in the minds of religious and civil authorities by the rising tide of medieval anticlericalism and free thinking that accompanied the decline of the old feudal system.[48] It was probably something of both, with a large area of overlap that represented an ill-defined but recognizable constellation of beliefs and occasional behavior exhibited by a significant number of men and women throughout central Europe between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries. But that certain individuals professed antinomian ideas, anticlerical sentiments, and unorthodox religious views (pantheism, perfectionism, etc.) as well as acted upon them, can hardly be denied in the face of the mass of evidence cited by Cohn, Lerner, Lambert, Russell, and others.[49]

This area of overlap, with its tragic confusions and consequences, warrants closer examination. Apart from the real if perhaps overestimated influence of political expediency, why should orthodox mystics such as Porete and Eckhart, as well as numbers of innocent beguines and beghards, be confused with decidedly unorthodox dissenters (whether Cathars or partisans of the "Free Spirit") in the minds of civil and church authorities and, evidently, at least some of the heretics themselves?

The Hint of an Explanation: Questing for Transcendence

Mystical antinomianism no doubt differs from what might be designated doctrinaire or, perhaps, ideological or secular antinomianism much as mystical conviction differs from firmly held belief of any other kind. A significant difference should also be noted between a personal developmental process that eventuates in active or passive transcendence of societal norms and laws and, conversely, adherence to a set of beliefs and values, especially shared beliefs and values, repudiating such laws and norms. But even if Porete, the beguines, and Eckhart were not mystical antinomians but mystics who were confused with mystical or even secular antinomians, the question from an ethical-psychological perspective remains pertinent: why was a perceived antinomian tendency so frequently attributed to the mystical proponents of the *Vita Apostolica*?

Historians generally agree that the teaching of these mystics lacks true antinomian elements, but exhorts their followers to surpass the limits of commonplace morality and spiritual aspiration. Their teachings on deification and (relative)

sinlessness were sufficiently similar to claims of heretical groups to warrant suspicion, but even these are subject to a more benign interpretation, as seen in the case of Eckhart. It is in the area of social conformity that Porete, the beguines, and Eckhart proved vulnerable and were apparently perceived to be linked to more radical sectarians.

Abstracting from doctrinal content, two main dimensions of mystical spirituality present themselves as subjects for evaluation in this respect—individual and social development. It may be granted that these dimensions are not unrelated. Social forces influence individuals, and individuals shape and modify social systems and structures.[50] They are not, however, equivalent, nor are the functions of interaction always evident, least of all to those experiencing them.

Assistance in clarifying these and related issues comes from several sources, first, functional-structural sociological analysis, particularly the insights of Robert K. Merton, Peter Berger, and Bryan R. Wilson in regard to responses to perceived disjunction between social objectives and the means of attaining them, and, second, theories of moral and faith development, particularly the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler.[51] A thorough examination of the individual and social elements ingredient in mystical antinomianism, especially in the form of what Cohn has called "revolutionary millenarianism," would, however, greatly exceed the limits of this essay. What follows is, accordingly, necessarily schematic.

Social Structure and Social Dysfunction

In attempting to account for variation in patterns of adaptation to perceived shifts in social structure and function, Robert K. Merton developed a theoretical model demonstrating how positive and negative responses differentiate *kinds* of nonconformity. Merton proposed five modes of behavior by which individuals engage in the dialectic of socialization, based on responses to cultural goals and the institutionalized means of attaining them.[52] *Conformity* assumes a positive attitude toward both goals and means. The four remaining modes of adaptation assume divergence in regard either to the desirability of the goals themselves or to the suitability of available means to attain them: *innovation, ritualism, retreatism*, and *rebellion*. Of these, innovation and rebellion are of principal concern in regard to understanding the social and ethical dialectics of medieval mysticism and antinomianism.

Innovation represents a positive, creative response to a perceived failure of institutionalized means to attain still-desirable cultural goals by developing new means of attaining them. This would have been the aim or at least the impact of mystics such as Porete, the beguines, and Eckhart, and in fact the *Vita Apostolica* as a whole. Rebellion, conversely, actively rejects and attempts to replace both previously-accepted goals and the institutionalized routes of achievement. In Merton's words,

> It is the conflict between culturally accepted values and the socially structured difficulties in living up to these values which exerts pressure toward deviant behavior and disruption of the normative system. This outcome of anomie, however, may be only a prelude to the development of new norms, and it is this response which we have described as "rebellion" in the typology of adaptation.[53]

(In Merton's analytic paradigm, ritualism represents a tacit abandonment of social goals and their replacement by previously accepted means. Retreatism passively abandons both goals and the institutionalized means of achieving them.)

The range of new religious movements in the Middle Ages seem to reflect patterns of innovation and rebellion, beginning with isolated groups such as the scholarly Almaricians or the peasants of the Swabian Ries but eventually manifest in socially disruptive forces such as the partisans of the Free Spirit and especially the Militant Anabaptists and Taborites of the fifteenth century. Whether secular radicals such as the leaders of the peasants' revolts or militant religious anarchists such as Fra Dolcino, John Bockelson, and Thomas Müntzer, antinomians would be classed as rebels intent on inaugurating an entirely new social order, even if one based on an idealized model of early Christianity.

Between the innovators and the rebels probably belong radical reformers such as Amaury of Bène and Arnold of Brescia, who may represent the true "mystical antinomians." In general, authorities representing the church and state, clinging to traditional goals or at least the conventional means of achieving them, reacted comprehensively. They snared not only rebellious antinomians and radical reformers, but also the innovative mystics whose "new spirit" in fact represented a constructive approach to resolving the growing disjunction between desirable cultural values and routes of achieving them but who were perceived as no less subversive.

In his 1973 study of modern millennial sect development, *Magic and the Millennium*, Bryan R. Wilson proposed an analytic model of specifically religious responses to perceived social dysfunction admittedly similar to but not derived from Merton's more general typology.[54] Wilson's model is more comprehensive than Merton's structural-functional paradigm, including seven rather than four modes of adaptation grouped into "objective," "subjective," and "relational" categories. Objectivists (revolutionists, introversionists, reformists, and utopians) approach social transformation from "outside" by changing their situation in that world or changing the world itself. Subjectivists (conversionists) and "manipulationists" among the relativist group focus on inner psychological or spiritual change effected by divine assistance. Finally, "thaumaturgists" (a species of relationist) believe that God will directly alter the social situation by means of miraculous intervention.

In Wilson's typology, conversionists and revolutionaries are polar opposites, the former convinced that that personal interior transformation will lead to salvation, while for the latter only wholesale destruction and reconstruction, whether by God alone or with human cooperation, can rectify the corrupt state of the world.[55] In such a paradigm, both mystics and rebels again assume countercultural positions, whether or not they espouse millenarian beliefs. But conversionists or mystics, intent on interior transformation resulting from a direct experience of God's presence, are less likely to evince antinomian attitudes than objectivists, especially the revolutionists, reformists, and utopians. As we have seen, to the extent that a mystic such as Porete or Eckhart advocates surpassing law or virtue it is by way of transcendence, not deviation.

In his exploration of the sociology of religion, *The Sacred Canopy,* Peter Berger focused even more sharply on ways in which mystical religion, "with its radical depreciation not only of the value but the reality-status of the empirical world," recasts social relationships through its de-alienating potential. "To the mystic this world and all its works, including those of 'ordinary' religious practice, are relativized. In extreme cases this relativization may lead to a religiously legitimated anarchism, as in the antinomian movements of Christianity and Judaism."[56]

But, as Berger admits, different practical mandates may be drawn from different perspectives. In this respect he cites a passage from one of the mystical "classics" of the fourteenth century Rhineland, the *Theologica Germanica:*

> order, laws, precepts, and the like are merely an admonition to men who understand nothing better and know and perceive nothing else; therefore are all law and order ordained. And perfect men accept the law along with such ignorant men as understand and know nothing other or better, and practice it with them, to the intent that thereby they may be kept from evil ways, or if it be possible, brought to something higher.[57]

"It is not difficult to see," Berger comments, "that an antinomian mandate is likely to have potentially revolutionary consequences," while the outlook expressed in other, more socially positive passages "is rather likely to have a conservative effect."[58] Thus while not a rebel, the orthodox mystic may still be a revolutionary, offering alternatives to those frustrated by the default of conventional routes of social and religious intercourse. The revolution she foments, however, is a return to deeper, more fundamental beliefs and values, in our case the *Vita Apostolica*, neither an exaltation of the status quo nor, conversely, its destruction, but its transformation.

Insights from Moral and Faith Development

Developmental psychology offers insights complementary to those of the social theorist into the process by which the moral vision of extraordinary individuals

can evolve differentially from those holding more conventional views.[59] Divergence from conventional values and patterns of behavior can thus be interpreted as evidence of moral and spiritual excellence rather than an abridgment or rejection of them. From this perspective, the difference between mysticism and true antinomianism is again significantly apparent. Ideally at least, the mystic is not less but more morally advanced than her contemporaries however she may be perceived by established authorities in a deteriorating social situation such as that which prevailed in the early fourteenth century.

For Lawrence Kohlberg, the relevant stages of moral development in his sequential paradigm are those from five to seven.[60] Conventional Stage 4 morality is transcended in Stage 5 in favor of a postconventional moral orientation based on the perceived good of society as a whole rather than personal or group advancement. Here, for instance, arises the possibility of interpreting legal obligations in favor of what is more just or "equitable" than merely "correct." Stage 6 morality, initially proposed as the final stage, is further determined by judgments of conscience and self-chosen ethical principles based on rational comprehensiveness, consistency, and universality.

In later writings, Kohlberg postulated a further stage of moral development envisioning the meaning of life as a whole.[61] Admittedly rare, Stage 7 morality would constitute the highest development of moral insight and human ethical behavior. Its character of ultimacy raises the issue of religious value, and Kohlberg concedes that Stage 7 can be construed as religious. This implies, of course, that at least a latent religious dimension is present in previous stages as well.

Claims of advancement to higher or even ultimate stages of moral and ethical insight and behavior such as those characteristic of the great mystics and also claimed by many radical antinomians would, in these terms, allow for evaluation using the criteria such as "the higher good," specifically universality and "alterity"—that is, holiness of life, conceived of as intensity in one's relation to God and expressed in heroic virtue in the service of others.[62] And it is precisely in this respect that the self-transcendent teachings of Marguerite Porete, the beguines, and Eckhart depart most significantly from the ego aggrandizement typical of the statements of partisans of the Free Spirit.[63] In one well-known instruction, for example, Eckhart insisted, "As I have said before, if a man were in an ecstasy as St. Paul was (2 Cor. 12:2–4), and if he knew of a sick person who needed a bowl of soup from him, I would consider it far better if you were to leave that rapture out of love and help the needy person out of greater love."[64]

Although critical of Kohlberg in respect to the narrowness and incompleteness of his stage-theory of moral development, James Fowler utilized many of Kohlberg's insights in developing structural stage-theory into an instrument for describing growth specifically in the area of in religious faith.[65] As had Kohlberg originally, Fowler envisions six stages of growth, proceeding from ego-centered faith to an overarching concern with universality:

> Heedless of the threats to self, to primary groups, and to the institutional arrangements of the present order that are involved, Stage 6 becomes a disciplined, activist incarnation—a making real and tangible—of the imperatives of absolute love and Justice of which Stage 5 has partial apprehensions. The self at Stage 6 engages in spending and being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent actuality.
>
> Persons best described by Stage 6 typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria of normalcy. Their heedlessness to self-preservation and the vividness of their taste and feel for transcendent moral and religious actuality give their actions and words an extraordinary and often unpredictable quality.[66]

Such unconcern for social amenity does not end with perceptions of eccentricity, however. According to Fowler, in transcending conventional norms of social interaction the Stage 6 personality may well give prophetic offense:

> In their devotion to universalizing compassion they may offend our parochial perceptions of justice. In their penetration through the obsession with survival, security, and significance they threaten our measured standards of righteousness and goodness and prudence. Their enlarged visions of universal community disclose the partialness of our tribes and pseudo-species. And their leadership initiatives, often involving strategies of nonviolent suffering and ultimate respect for being, constitute affronts to our usual notions of relevance. It is little wonder that persons best described by Stage 6 so frequently become martyrs for the visions they incarnate.[67]

Alert to the statistical limitations of testing for advanced faith development, Fowler later described State 6 development as "exceedingly rare." But he also reiterated the socially revolutionary aspects of such unusual specimens of humanity:

> Living with felt participation in a power that unifies and transforms the world, Universalizers are often experienced as subversive of the structures (including religious structures) by which we sustain our individual and corporate survival, security and significance. Many persons in this stage die at the hands of those whom they hope to change.[68]

I suggest that it is this "subversive" aspect of the Stage 6 "Universalizers'" social agenda that links them to mystics such as Porete and Eckhart, whose revolutionary agenda revitalized the spiritual culture of their time despite the severe reprisals their challenge to conventional religion and morality evoked from institutional representatives.[69] But the qualities of compassion (alterity) and universality also serve to distinguish them from radical antinomians, whose more parochial agenda tended to veer toward self-serving and socially disruptive ends.[70]

Summary and Conclusion

It has become a truism in religious studies that mystical experience, the direct and immediate ("here-now") apprehension of divine presence and activity within the mystic herself and also the world of nature and society, relativizes the claim of the institutional church (or state) to control absolutely the means of spiritual (or social) salvation. Even so, great medieval mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso, Catherine of Siena, and, at the end of the era, Joan of Arc and even Savonarola, considered themselves, and were in the view of posterity, loyal members of the church. Nevertheless, they were perceived by institutional authorities of their own time to pose a threat to the integrity of society and to one degree or another suffered the consequences of that suspicion. Beginning to unravel such antinomies has been the burden of this essay.

Exploring the roots of mystical antinomianism discloses, I believe, an enduring if conflictual connection between spirituality and ethics in the area of both personal and social transcendence. From the perspectives of structural-functional social analysis and developmental psychology, it can be argued that the difference between the mystical and political antinomians lies in the ability of the former to compensate for the moral and spiritual deficiencies of society precisely by the loyalty and reforming innovations made possible by their exceptional moral maturity and spiritual development. The latter, conversely, tend to reject societal norms as such, often for manifestly self-serving purposes, sundering their ties to the larger body of believers, and sometimes establishing even more repressive and totalitarian substitutes. Historically, this in turn provoked deadly reprisals from both Catholic and later Protestant authorities.

The authentic mystic can thus be interpreted as an innovator or true revolutionary, inspired by what she perceives as direct experience of God's presence within to offer alternative routes toward the essential goals of religious faith in the face of a rapidly changing social situation. Her message lies mainly in an appeal to self-transformation and social transcendence, which is to say the pursuit of the loftiest ideals and values of Christian community as she perceives them. Conversely, radical antinomians, by assuming the role of rebels, religious or otherwise, anticipate and even attempt actively and often destructively

to replace the traditional goals of society along with the conventional means of attaining them. Thus, ironically, by striking out at the mystics (e.g., Porete, the beguines and beghards, Eckhart) as if they advocated or at least supported radical antinomianism, church and state authorities probably removed a source of influence that could have prevented or at least restrained the destructive violence of rebellions such as the reformist uprisings, peasants' revolts, and religious anarchies that bloodied Europe from the late thirteenth century through the early Reformation period.

Today, as not only Christians but people the world over fall increasingly under the sway of the third millennium, not least because of the fervor with which the popular news and entertainment media have seized upon the idea, we may well wonder whether spiritual and ethical lessons from the past might guide us into a less ominous future than that presaged by Jonestown, Waco, the Order of the Solar Temple, and Heaven's Gate. Here, insights into the social significance of moral and spiritual development by social theorists such as Merton, Wilson, Berger, Kohlberg, and Fowler (among others) may offer reason for hope. For as Norman Cohn predicted in the mid-twentieth century, if revolutionary millenarians are likely to accompany us into the future, so too are the mystics.

Notes

1. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 10.
2. See Damian Thompson, *The End of Time* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996). For a critique of the dating of the Christian era and the miscalculation of the date of Jesus' birth, see Steven Jay Gould, *Questioning the Millennium* (New York: Random House, 1997), 106–28, and E.G. Richards, *Mapping Time: The Calendar and Its History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 219ff.
3. The terms *antinomian* and *antinomianism* are modern rather than ancient, although antecedents exist in both classical and *koine* Greek of the early Christian era. For classical pagan authors, although the verb *antinoméo* meant "to disobey [the law]," it more generally referred to a conflict of laws (Philostratos, Quintillian) or an ambiguity in the law (Plutarch). Christian writers in late antiquity likewise used the term *antinomía* to signify a conflict of laws (e.g., John Chrysostom, *Hom. in 1 Cor. 7:39*, *Hom. 62 in Matthew*, etc.). The related verb *antinomothetéo* denoted "legislation in opposition to [other law]" for Athanasius, Epiphanius, Eusebius, John Chrysostom, and Origen. It also signified "to disobey [the law]" for Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Theodoret, and others. But in late antiquity for both pagan and Christian writers, the terms seem not to have the special meaning assigned after the Middle Ages, that is, freedom from the obligation of obeying the moral law (*Oxford English Dictionary*, I, 370). In this sense, *antinomie* is first used in French around 1546 in reference to religious dissent. As a substantive, "antinomic" was used in English by 1586. "Antinomianism" and "antinomian" appear about a century later, notably in Milton, who in 1643 referred to "Anabaptism, Familism, Antinomianism, and other fanatick dreams" (Milton, *Divorce,* xiv [Ibid.]).
4. The classic work in this regard remains Herbert Grundmann's *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages,* trans. by Steven Rowan, intro. by Robert E. Lerner (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), which has been amply confirmed, if never entirely surpassed, by the meticulous research of Lambert, Leff, Lerner, McDonnell, Moore, Russell, and others.

5. See below, n. 48.
6. For present purposes, mysticism may be defined as a direct and immediate apprehension of the presence of God within the personal experience of individual men and women as distinct, but not necessarily separate, from devotion to God, participation in worship (including sacramental forms), and spontaneous prayer experiences, visions, and other quasi-sensory phenomena. Cf. Richard Woods, *Mysterion: An Introduction to Mystical Spirituality* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1981). See also Evelyn Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1960), and Richard Woods, ed., *Understanding Mysticism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image Books, 1980).
7. For a thorough description of early and medieval mysticism, see Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God*, Vol. 1: *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), Vol. 2: *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), and Vol. 3: *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).
8. Pejorative references in primitive Christian writings employ the ordinary term *ánomos*, "lawless." But despite the personification in 2 Thess. 2:8, passages such as Rom. 2:12, 1 Cor. 9:21, and 1 Tim 1:9, simply allude to sin as law-breaking, or refer to being "outside the law." This is also the case with Mark 15:28, Acts 2:23, 2 Pet. 2:8, and Jude 4 and 8. In 1 John 3:4, a more pointed remark is found: "Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness [*anomían*]; sin is lawlessness [*anomía*]." Other Pauline sources include Gal. 5:18, Romans 8:2, 1 Cor. 6:12 and 10:23.
9. See Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Ávila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).
10. Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). Historical scholarship has advanced significantly since Msgr. Knox first published his elegant study of enthusiastic movements and sects in 1950. But few modern writers have, I think, grasped more acutely the psychological and spiritual disposition of the antinomian personality or so carefully distinguished its various manifestations.
11. For instances and discussion, see Chamberlain, Cohn, Grundmann, Lambert, Leff, Lerner, and Moore, inter alia. See also Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), passim.
12. See esp. Grundmann, *Religious Movements,* 173–76.
13. In one instance, Albert observed that such views were not "heresy which could be refuted but silliness which deserved a good whipping." Grundmann, *Religious Movements,* 176. Albert seems not to have interrogated the heretics personally, but only evaluated the reports. Ibid., 173.
14. See Grundmann, *Religious Movements,* 177–79.
15. David of Dinant was also condemned along with Amaury's students in 1210, but it is uncertain whether any relationship existed between him and the Almaricians. See Grundmann, *Religious Movements,* 178.
16. While Cohn believes that the accusation was probably true (*Pursuit of the Millennium,* 156), Grundmann remarks, cogently, "A philosophical inversion of Christian morality of such enthusiastic daring as the Amaurians created is not to be explained from the same motivations as the virtually universal moral depravity of the clergy of this time. Rather it is an effort to bridge the yawning gap between Christian doctrine and the way of life of most Church-Christians. But while the religious poverty movement sought to conquer this discrepancy by recognizing once more Christian moral teaching as a strict commandment for leading the Christian life, the pupils of Amaury sought through their new teaching simply to eliminate the tension between religious norm and the necessities of life. Their religious convictions played as much of a role as their faith in an epoch-making mission which found its strongest echo precisely among religious women." Grundmann, *Religious Movements,* 159.
17. See Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 153–56 and Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 158–65.
18. See M.D. Chenu, O.P., "Monks, Canons, and Laymen in Search of the Apostolic Life," in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives*

in the Latin West, edited and translated by Jerome Taylor and L.K. Little, preface by Etienne Gilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 202–38. The impact of changing patterns of religious expression in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has also been explored in depth by Grundmann, Little, and Lopez, among others (see bibliography).

19. See M.D. Chenu, O.P., "The Evangelical Awakening," in Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society,* 239–69.
20. For a relevant analysis of the interaction of mysticism and political legitimacy in the later medieval and early Tudor period, see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
21. Although dated, the outstanding studies of the beguine movement remain that by Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, and especially Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Cornell University Press, 1954).
22. According to Grundmann, "Just as individual religious women were accused of heresy due to their confession of the ideal of chastity, and were burned for it, the entire women's religious movement in the bishopric of Liege was suspected of heresy by the diocesan clergy until James of Vitry won them recognition from the curia. For this very reason, they called the women who lived in voluntary poverty and chastity to follow the gospel, whether individually or in groups, by the same heretical name they gave the Cathars in Southern France: beguines." *Religious Movements,* 80. He adds, "What is certain is that the Cologne chronicler used the term "Beggini" at the start of the thirteenth century as the proper term for Albigensians" [ibid., 304, n. 26.]
23. Grundmann, Religious Movements, 165.
24. Knox, *Enthusiasm,* 1–4, passim.
25. Grundmann, *Religious Movements,* 400, n. 9; 401, n. 15, and passim.
26. Ibid., 402, n. 20.
27. For a differing view regarding ecstasy in Eckhart, see Robert K. Forman, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic as Theologian* (Rockport, Mass., and Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1991).
28. The literature on Porete, the beguines, and Eckhart is extensive and growing. Among recent works, see Bernard McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics* (New York: Continuum, 1994); and Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996). Scholars are still divided on whether the positions of Porete and Eckhart were at least materially heretical. Herbert Grundmann regarded both as orthodox. Some recent commentators such as Colledge and Marler seem content that both the beguine and the Dominican were expressing heretical views, but the majority of scholars today now seem to agree with Grundmann's assessment. See Grundmann, *Religious Movements,* 182–84.
29. Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 184.
30. Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972. Reprint, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 75.
31. Ibid., 76.
32. See Edmund Colledge and R. Guarnieri, "The Glosses by 'M.N.' and Richard Methley to 'The Mirror of Simple Souls,'" *Archivio Italiano per la storia della pieta*, V (1968): 357–82.
33. Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, translated and edited by Ellen Babinski (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 99.
34. Ibid., 12.
35. Ibid., 120.
36. Ibid., 126.
37. See Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit*, 79–80.
38. *Const. Clement.*, lib. III, tit. XI, de *religiosis domibus*, c. 1. Cited by McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards,* 524.
39. See McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, 496.
40. Nos. 891–899 Ann. 1312: Clemens V: Cc. Viennense, 891–908: Sessio III, 6. Maii 1312: *Constitutio "Ad nostrum qui."* Cited in McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards,* 497–98.

41. McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 526–27.
42. For the text of the condemned propositions and discussion, see Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense*, translated and edited by Bernard McGinn and Edmund Colledge (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 12–23, 77–81. See also Bernard McGinn, "Meister Eckhart's Condemnation Reconsidered," *The Thomist* 44 (1980): 390–414.
43. See Richard Woods, O.P., "I am the Son of God: Eckhart and Aquinas on the Incarnation," *Eckhart Review* (June 1992): 27–46.
44. Eckhart, *Essential Sermons*, 44, n. 142.
45. German Sermon 16b, Meister Eckhart, *Sermons and Treatises*, translated by M. O'C. Walshe, 3 vols. (Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1987), Vol. I, 128.
46. German Sermon 81, ibid., Vol. II, 126.
47. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 165–66.
48. Jeffrey B. Russell, for instance, maintains that proponents of the Heresy of the Free Spirit "never existed as a group except in the fantasy of the agents of order, who needed a category into which they could force a variety of people preaching antinomianism—the liberation of the individual from secular and ecclesiastical law by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once categorized, they could be assigned an amalgam of beliefs and practices (such as sexual license) that corresponded little with reality." Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Dissent and Order in the Middle Ages: The Search for Legitimate Authority* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 66–67. See Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 186.
49. "In Cologne about 1340, John of Brunn confessed to having been a beguin whose confidence in the Freedom of the Spirit permitted him to lie, fornicate, murder, have orgies, and to commit incest, sodomy, and infanticide. Such charges were beginning to be made against 'witches' as well. Some fanatics actually believed and practiced such things, but their numbers and organization (if any) were exaggerated by the frightened authorities. The confession of John Hartmann at Erfurt in 1367 included the approval of incest, even upon the altar, along with the convenient doctrine that a woman could regain her lost virginity by fornicating with one of the Free Spirits. Again, it is difficult to judge whether John's confession was coerced and therefore whether there was any truth in it." Russell, *Dissent and Order*, 78.
50. A classic statement of this dialectical pattern is found in Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1969), especially 15–19. The same point was made by William Ernest Hocking in his important 1912 work, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952 ed.). Neither of these authors implies, however, that the social dialectic is a closed system.
51. Volleys of criticism have been aimed at the theories of these authors, not least those of Kohlberg and Fowler. It is not my intention nor indeed is it possible here to enter into the complex and sometimes heated debate over various issues. Rather, I am proposing these models as a set of similar hypothetical constructs based on a wide range and variety of research that points towards certain general characteristics of corporate and individual responses to perceived deficiencies in commonly accepted moral and religious norms. Although susceptible to interpretation as antinomian, these responses are more likely to represent elaborations of existing social values and behavioral codes.
52. See Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968 ed.), 194ff.
53. Ibid., 245. See also 215: "As initially developed by Durkheim, the concept of anomie referred to a condition of relative normlessness in a society or group. Durkheim made it clear that this concept referred to a property of the social and cultural structure, not to a property of individuals confronting that structure. Nevertheless, as the utility of the concept for understanding diverse forms of deviant behavior became evident, it was extended to refer to a condition of individuals rather than of their environment."
54. See Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (London: Heinemann, 1973), esp. 9–29.

55. Ibid., 22–23.
56 Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 98. Recognizing the relevance of Berger's observations regarding the de-alienating potential of mysticism need not entail accepting his views regarding the social construction of reality. For a brief theological critique of Berger's sociological theory of religion, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 133–36.
57. J. Bernhart, ed., *Theologia germanica* (New York: Pantheon, 1949), 149.
58. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 98. Here, perhaps, Grundmann's comment is most germane: "after the Council of Vienne the representatives of 'orthodox mysticism' took up the most aggressive battle against the heretical mysticism of the 'free spirit.'" Grundmann, *Religious Movements,* 186.
59. For a summary evaluation and critique of the developmental theories of Erikson, Kohlberg, Fowler, and others, see Daniel Helminiak, *Spiritual Development: An Interdisciplinary Study* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987).
60. See Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Implications of Moral Stages for Adult Education," *Religious Education* 72 (1977): 183–201; "Stages and Sequence: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Socialization," in *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research,* edited by D.A. Goslin (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969); and Lawrence Kohlberg and Cheryl Armon, "Three Types of Stage Models Used in the Study of Adult Cognitive Behavior," in *Beyond Formal Operations: Late Adolescent and Adult Cognitive Behavior,* edited by Michael L. Commons, Francis A. Richards, and Cheryl Armon (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), 338–94.
61. See Lawrence Kohlberg and Clark Power, "Moral Development, Religious Thinking, and the Question of a Seventh Stage," in Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice, Essays on Moral Development,* Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 311–72.
62. I am using the term "alterity" as developed in the work of Edith Wyschogrod, especially *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). See also Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond, eds., *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
63. See in this regard the citations by Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium,* 174–83 and Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit,* 16–17.
64. *Talks of Instruction*, 10, Eckhart, *Sermons and Treatises*, vol. III, 23–24. Cf. His remark in German Sermon 5a: "[J]ust as in human nature nothing is strange and nothing is further or nearer, so it is necessary that you should make no distinction in the family of men, not being closer to yourself than to another. You must love all men equally, respect and regard them equally, and whatever happens to another, whether good or bad, must be the same as if it happened to you." Ibid., vol. I, 110.
65. Fowler was influenced by Robert Bellah's essay "Religious Evolution," in *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). Both theorists are also indebted to pioneering work by Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget. It is important to note that such authors are proposing *theories* of development based more or less on empirical observation rather than articulating the results of statistical research and experimentation. In regard to medieval mystics and antinomians, for whom statistical information is largely lacking and to an extent irrelevant, it is the theoretical, interpretative elements of these theories that are illuminating.
66. James W. Fowler and Sam Keen, *Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith* (Oak Grove, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1978), 88–89, cited in James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 200.
67. Ibid.
68. James W. Fowler, "Perspectives on the Family from the Perspective of Faith Development Theory," *The Perkins Journal* 33, 1 (Fall 1979): 13–14, cited in Fowler *Stages of Faith*, 200–201. The reason is not hard to fathom: "Even as they oppose the more blatantly unjust or unredeemed structures of the social, political or religious world, these figures also call into

question the compromise arrangements in our common life that have acquired the sanction of conventionalized understandings of justice." Ibid., 202.

69. A similar appraisal of the socially critical function of the mystic's development was made by Hocking in *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963 ed.). The "subversive" consequences, if not intent, of mystical spirituality has also been explored from a textual perspective by Michael Sells in *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Parallels between cognitive and social dissent as the result of the mystic's penchant for alternative modes of discourse are intriguing and, indeed, instructive.
70. Manifold examples can be found in accounts of utopian and anarchist sects by Chamberlain, Cohn, Leff, Lerner, and other historians. Similar patterns exist in contemporary millenarian sects and separatist movements such as the Peoples' Temple founded by Jim Jones, the Order of the Solar Temple, the Branch Davidians, and the Heaven's Gate cult.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Infinity of Desire: Love, Mystical Union, and Ethics in Sufism

by Michael Sells

ABŪ YAZĪD AL-BISṬĀMĪ (d. ca. 875 C.E.), known popularly as Bayezid, has been at the center of accusations and controversies regarding mystical union, transgression, and codes of behavior in Sufism. No writings of Bisṭāmī have survived, and we have no first-hand information on his life. Most of the early sayings attributed to him are found in selections of *Shaṭaḥāt* ("ecstatic utterances," "mystical blurtings") and biographies of Sufi shaykhs. Most sayings include a chain of transmitters (*isnād*) along with the substance of the saying, in the manner of hadith collections. *Shaṭaḥāt,* however, are a genre of sayings that by their very nature are viewed as inevitably controversial, if not scandalous, and in need of careful scrutiny and examination. The tradition of criticism, defense, and commentary on the sayings attributed to Bisṭāmī becomes a key element in emerging Sufism. Bisṭāmī takes up the largest section of the chapter on *Shaṭaḥāt* in the *Kitāb al-Luma' (Book of the Flashes)* of Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj (d. 988 C.E.), the earliest major exposition of Sufi life and thought. By this time, the figure of Bisṭāmī was firmly established at the center of Sufi discussions of *fanā'*, the annihilation of the self in mystical union with the deity.

Bisṭāmī is also the central figure in R.C. Zaehner's *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*.[1] The book helped cement a number of contemporary scholarly characterizations of Bisṭāmī. While doing so, it posed a sweeping moral condemnation of much of the Sufi tradition concerning mystical union, along with some criticisms of the essence, as defined by Zaehner, of Islam. The terms and categories in which these judgments are framed exemplify a major trend in the discussion of mysticism and ethics, and through the sustained nature of the argument, they reveal a larger pattern in the ethical critiques of Islamic mysticism and Islam. Although the more obvious problems with Zaehner's apologetics and essentialized types of mysticism have been recognized, Zaehner's work has maintained a central place in discussion of Sufism and ethics, largely due to the presentation of

Zaehner (by himself and the academic milieu he represented) as a rigorously hard-headed scholar willing to examine the evidence with honesty.

Zaehner's claims concerning Sufism can be summarized as follows: (1) After living a hyperorthopractic life, Bisṭāmī, through his teacher Abū ʿAlī as-Sindī, encountered the Vedāntic monism of Śaṇkara and became a monist himself; (2) The major proof of Bisṭāmī's monism is a saying attributed to him that is incomprehensible in an Islamic context and can only be understood as a culturally undigested reflection of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*'s formula "that thou art" (*tat tvam asi*); (3) Monism led Bisṭāmī to ego inflation, identification of himself with all creation and with the creator, and contempt for Islamic orthopraxis; (4) Bisṭāmī's monism destroys ethics because it lacks the love found in Christianity and in the modified nondualism of Rāmānuja; (5) Before Bisṭāmī, Sufism had offered a valid religious vision based upon a relationship of loving intercourse with God; (6) Love is alien to Islam and nonmonist Sufis borrowed it from Christianity; (7) Vedāntic monism is also alien and antithetical to Islam, but after its introduction into Sufism through Bisṭāmī, subsequent Sufi thinkers and Islam as a whole failed to reject it, leading to religious degradation.

As we engage Zaehner's specific claims, we find not one but multiple Bisṭāmīs. These Bisṭāmīs exist at the nexus of Islamic interaction with several traditions, including Merkavah mysticism. To understand such a nexus, we need to consider an alternative model of cultural interaction in place of Zaehner's theory of passive reception. At the deepest core of the Bisṭāmī texts, we are led to a reconception of love and transgression within Islam, a reconception with significant implications for ethics and interreligious conversation.

We Have Seen Thee and Thou Are That

The key piece of evidence that Bisṭāmī represents "Hinduism in Muslim Dress" (the title of a central chapter in *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*) is the following saying:

> Abū Yazīd is reported to have said [Sarrāj tells us] "Once [God] raised me up and placed me before him, and said to me: 'O Abū Yazīd, verily my creation longs to see thee.' And I said: 'Adorn me with thy unity and clothe me in thine I-ness and raise me up unto thy oneness, so that when thy creatures see me, they may say: "We have seen thee (i.e. God) and thou are that." Yet I (Abū Yazīd) will not be there at all.'" (Z 94, Sarrāj 383)[2]

Zaehner argues that the phrase "thou are that" in the saying is unintelligible in an Islamic context. The referent of "thou" in "thou are that" is God, but God is never referred to in Islam through demonstratives such as "that" (*dhāka)*, but

only through the personal pronoun "he." The formula can only be explained through parallels found in Vedānta, in either the same or similar wording.

The sweep of Zaehner's analysis is impressive. His humble protestations at the beginning of *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* notwithstanding, Zaehner had an excellent command of Arabic, as demonstrated by his translations of the notoriously difficult texts attributed to the early Sufi Junayd that are provided at the end of the same volume. It is indeed true that the phrase *inta dhāka* used of God would be highly unusual if not utterly bizarre within an Islamic context. Zaehner argues that one of the transmitters of this and other sayings of Bisṭāmī, Abū ʿAlī as-Sindī, as was suggested by the earlier Islamicist R.A. Nicholson, had converted from an Eastern religion, and that that Eastern religion must have been Vedāntic Hinduism. It was after meeting Sindī that Bisṭāmī would have abandoned his previous moderate Sufism and adopted the Vedāntic monism exposed in the formula *inta dhāka.* Now that the Vedāntic source of Bisṭāmī's utterance has been revealed, the poisonous effects of Bisṭāmī's Vedāntic monism on Islam can be traced down through later generations of Sufi writers. Thus, Zaehner engages two vast traditions and through both historical and linguistic analysis shows exactly when and how one of those traditions altered the other, revealing the immensity of the moral issues at stake in such an alteration.

Yet when we check the fine print, we find something strange at the heart of the "thou art that" argument, something that will recur throughout Zaehner's larger argument concerning mysticism and monism. In his translation Zaehner had interpolated the parenthesis "(i.e. God)" into the key passage (emphasis mine): "And I said: 'Adorn me with thy unity and clothe me in thine I-ness and raise me up unto thy oneness, so that when the creatures see me, they may say: *"We have seen thee (i.e. God) and thou are that.*" Yet I (Abū Yazīd) will not be there at all.'" The entire argument rests upon the assumption that the grammatical antecedent of "thee" and "thou" is—necessarily—"God," without any other possibility.

Zaehner's interpolation seems innocent enough. It is unlikely that most readers in comparative mysticism, the majority of whom would not be literate in medieval Arabic, would doubt what appears to be a straightforward translation by a scholar whose Arabic skills were impeccable. When we check the text, however, we find that Zaehner's interpolation is anything but innocent; the logical and natural antecedent for "thee" in "We have seen thee," is not "God" (the antecedent necessary for Zaehner's entire argument that the formula could not exist in an Islamic context), but rather "Bisṭāmī." When we break the saying down, we find the following:

1. God raises up Bisṭāmī:
2. God says to Bisṭāmī: "My (God's) creatures long to see thee (Bisṭāmī)"
3. Bisṭāmī says: "And I (Bisṭāmī) said: 'Adorn me with thy unity and clothe me in thine I-ness and raise me up unto thy oneness, so that when the

creatures see me, they may say: "We have seen thee and thou are that." Yet I (Bisṭāmī) will not be there at all.'"

The creatures are speaking out of their expressed desire to see Bisṭāmī. Thus when they say, "we have seen thee," contextual logic suggests they are referring to the one they had asked to see, that is, Bisṭāmī. After Bisṭāmī heard that the creatures longed to see him (Bisṭāmī), he requested that God "adorn him in divine unity, cloak him in I-ness, and raise him into oneness [*zayyanī biwaḥdāniyyatika wa albisnī anāniyytaka wa arfa'nī ilā aḥadiyyatika*]." Thus, it is natural that when the creatures see Bisṭāmī, they proclaim that Bisṭāmī is "that" (the divine unity, I-ness, and oneness in which he has been cloaked). The use of the demonstrative *dhāka* in such a context poses no difficulty; unity, I-ness, and oneness are abstracts, and a demonstrative pronoun would be a natural way of referring to such abstracts.

The final phrase, "Yet, I will not be there," reinforces the logic that the creatures are speaking to Bisṭāmī. The creatures asked to see Bisṭāmī but Bisṭāmī asked God to cloak him in—and raise him up into—divine unity so that Bisṭāmī is no longer seen and, more radically, no longer there to be an object of vision or even of address. Such a reading makes clear sense in terms of Sufi notions of *fanā'* or passing away. Indeed, the transmitter of the saying and its commentator Sarrāj, whose method is to take on the most antagonistic readings of Bisṭāmī and defend them, cites no critic as interpreting "thou" in "thou art that" as God.

In either case, Bisṭāmī's saying is scandalous; who, after all, is Bisṭāmī that all of creation asks the creator to see him, and who is he that God would cloak him in divine attributes of unity and identity? To explain the latter issue of being cloaked in divine unity, Sarrāj cites the famous *hadith qudsi* of supererogatory devotions (*nawāfil*). Allah declares divine love for the mystic who carries out both required and supererogatory devotions. Allah then announces: "When I love my servant, I become the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, the feet with which he walks, and the hands with which he touches." Here we find the classic notion of the divine "clothing" the human in divine attributes at the moment of mystical union when the ego-self of the human passes away. Zaehner dismisses Sarrāj's readings as attempts to water down and hide the monism. Even if we were to stipulate that Sarrāj was willing to dilute or hide the problematic aspects of Bisṭāmī, Sarrāj's method is to cite the most damaging criticisms before going on to make his defense. Apparently not even Bisṭāmī's harshest critics came up with Zaehner's awkward and forced reading. The same conclusion can be gathered from the writings of the major contemporary translator of early Sufi literature, Richard Gramlich.[3]

Whenever a Sufi discusses mystical union, the effort to find clear grammatical antecedents is difficult. In classical Arabic dialogues, without the help of quotation marks or punctuation, it is often difficult to know when the speakers switch. In the case of mystical union in which the human party is annihilated or raised

up into unity, this difficulty is compounded by the fact there are two speakers but at some point there is only one reality. In this case, however, the basic logic of the saying makes it clear that Bisṭāmī is the primary antecedent. The same logic places the philosophical problem into the realm of a common story about Bisṭāmī: people are always talking to him, sometimes to speak of his annihilation in the divine, but he is no longer there to serve as an addressee.[4]

The existence of a more natural (though not necessarily less transgressive) reading does not mean that there was no Vedāntic influence on Sufism. Given the ways cultures are constantly creating themselves in part through negotiation with other cultures, it would be strange if there were not currents of Vedāntic and other Eastern thought circulating through the Islamic world, particularly in the Eastern regions where Bisṭāmī is said to have lived. Indeed, if "Bisṭāmī" is the antecedent, then the "thou art that" might fit the *Chāndogya*'s *tat tvam asi* formula even better than if the antecedent were God.[5] Zaehner's argument, however, is not based on the formal parallelism alone. Such a formal parallelism proves nothing in particular. Sufi discussions of mystical union necessarily involve the collapse of antecedents into each other. The number of permutations for such a collapse (you are he, you are I, you are that, I am you, I am he, I am that, etc.) is finite, and at some point a formal similarity to Vedānta or any other mystical discourse that involves the collapse of antecedents at the moment of stated union or unity is inevitable. Zaehner's argument is based on the assertion that the exclamation *inta dhāka* (you are that) is impossible in an Islamic context because God would never be referred to, even in the context of mystical union, as "that", but only and always through a personal pronoun such as *huwa* (he). As noted above, however, when the antecedents are read according to the contextual logic of the saying, the antecedent for *dhāka* would not be God but rather the divine "unity, I-ness, and oneness," which are abstractions and which would be referred to by a demonstrative rather than a personal pronoun.

What is most significant about Zaehner's reading is that he used an interpolation to preclude the most natural meaning, without acknowledging it. We cannot attribute such a result to any weakness in Arabic; in his other translations, where his own agenda is not involved directly, he shows mastery of exactly the same kind of dialogical and mystical complexities that occur in the Bisṭāmī saying at issue here. Once the interpolation is made and presented as the only possible reading, then Zaehner can argue that such language is impossible in Islamic discourse (and it would indeed be, at least, highly unusual) and that it must come from Vedānta—an argument that has the indisputable force of tautology.

Zaehner's procedure may seem to be a case of technical fudging. He has overargued his case in one way, underargued it in another. He missed the more natural reading that would actually increase the formal parallelism, but would lose the hypothesis that the phrase is inherently impossible in Islamic discourse and must be a borrowing. Zaehner's method in this case, however, offers a key to

a wider pattern of argumentation concerning mystical union, love, ethics, and relationships among neighboring mystical traditions. Zaehner's treatment of Bisṭāmī's Mi'rāj or heavenly ascent opens directly into these larger issues.

The Secret of Bisṭāmī's Mi'rāj

Zaehner's proof text is the following version found in Sarrāj in which Bisṭāmī states:

> As soon as I reached [God's] unity "I became a bird whose body was of oneness and whose wings were of everlastingness, and I went on flying in the atmosphere of relativity for ten years until I entered into an atmosphere a hundred million times as large; and I went on flying until I reached the expanse of eternity and in it I saw the tree of oneness." Then [says Sarrāj], he described the soil [in which it grew], its root and branch, its shoots and fruits, and then he said: "Then I looked, and I knew that all this was deceit." (Z 94, Sarrāj 384)

This saying is one of the earliest recorded accounts of Bisṭāmī's Mi'rāj. Zaehner suggests that the tree in this quote is the cosmic tree found in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, as well as the *Muṇḍaka* and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads*.[6] The term deceit (*khuda'*) is thus a direct translation of the Hindu *māyā* in its Advaita Vedānta meaning of illusion.

A supporting version used by Zaehner comes from text attributed to the later compiler, Sahlajī (d. ca. 1085 C.E.). In this saying, Bisṭāmī states:

> I plunged into the oceans of *malakūt* (the realm of pure ideas) and the veils of deity (*lāhūt*) until I reached the throne, and lo, it was empty; so I cast myself upon it and said, "Master, where shall I seek thee?" And the veils were lifted up, and I saw that I am I, yea, I am I. I turned back into what I sought, and it was I, no other, into which I was going." (Z 133, Sahlajī 128)[7]

Zaehner again imputes the necessity of a foreign import here on the grounds that "Once again these sayings which to Muslims ears were either heinous blasphemy or plain lunacy, are absolutely typical of the Vedānta," and then goes on to cite some Vedāntic parallels. For Zaehner, the two versions of the Mi'rāj cited above are the authentic core of the story, along with the first part of the account given by Hujwīrī (d. ca. 1071 C.E.):

> My innermost soul (*sirr*) was rapt into the heavens, but it looked at nothing [on the way]. Heaven and hell were displayed to it, but it paid

> no attention to anything; and it was drawn up beyond [all] contingent beings and all that veiled him from its sight. And I became a bird and flew continuously in the atmosphere of [God's] essence (*huwiyya*) until I overlooked the broad plain of oneness in which I saw the tree of eternity without beginning. When I looked [upon it all], all of it was I. I said: "O Lord God, so long as a sense of 'I' remains, there is no way from me to thee, nor have I any means of passing beyond the selfhood of self. What shall I do?" [Then] the command came [saying]: "O Abū Yazīd, thou canst not escape from thy consciousness of being a 'thou' except by following our beloved; wipe thine eye with the dust of his feet as with collyrium and never cease to follow after him." (Z 124–25)[8]

Here the key change, Zaehner argues, is the substitution of "When I looked [upon it all], all of it was I" instead of "I saw that it was a deceit (*khuda'*)" of the other version. The Hujwīrī version then indicates that "in Hujwīrī the pantheistic vision is represented as being a literally infinite expansion of the ego, not as a release from the ego." The likely parallel is the *Bhagavad Gītā*: "He whose self is integrated by Yoga sees himself as being in all creatures, and all creatures in himself." (*Gītā* 6.29, Z 126) With both Hujwīrī and the later Persian writer 'Aṭṭār (d. 1230 C.E.), Bisṭāmī realizes the error of his identification with all things and renounces it, a recognition that is "a postscript to the saying which is certainly not original" (Z 127).[9]

How are we to evaluate this hypothesis that the Bisṭāmī Mi'rāj traditions are based on a Vedāntic monism that in later traditions is watered down with defensive interpolations showing Bisṭāmī recognizing and retreating from his own error? Zaehner throughout treats his parallels between these Mi'rāj texts with passages from Upaniṣadic literature with more caution than he had the "thee art thou" formula. They are tenuous indeed. Concerning the statement that the tree of unity was a "cheat," for example, the Upaniṣadic examples are less than clear.[10] In addition, there is enough imagery within Islamic traditions concerning cosmic trees (tree of life, *sidr* tree of vision, tree of paradise, tree of destiny, blessed tree neither of the East nor of the West) to allow the possibility that one of these trees from the Islamic tradition set the literary precedent for the tree of oneness in this Mi'rāj.

A central clue to the issue of Bisṭāmī's Mi'rāj and its relation to neighboring mystical traditions is to be found in another text, that Zaehner describes in the following manner:

> Another and totally distinct version, however, exists, and was published by Nicholson in Islamic, vol. ii, pp. 402–15. This version, however, is without interest from the point of view of comparative mysticism since it is a more or less conventional account of the mystic's journey through

> the seven heavens, and is designed to confirm the claims of the Prophet through the mouth of Abū Yazīd himself who had vaunted his own superiority to him. (Z 128)

Just as Zaehner left out the more natural reading of the "thou art that" text, here he leaves out the text that will completely transform the ground on which his argument is based. This text "without interest from the point of view of comparative mysticism" turns out to be indisputable evidence of a close interaction between Jewish Merkavah and Hekhalot accounts of mystical ascent and the Bisṭāmī Mi'rāj tradition. Below is a précis of this remarkable text:[11]

> Bisṭāmī dreams he ascends the heavens carried at first on a green bird. In the course of the journey he is faced with an unprecedented trial. Angels of intimidating size spread out before him gifts of every kind and mastery of the heavens and all knowledge. At each heaven, he lowers his eyes, knowing he is being tested, and responds to the angels' offer (with some minor variants): "dear/great one (*'azīzī*), my desire is not in what you are showing me." A fire then flares within his heart-secret (*sirr*) reducing the majestic angels to the size and likeness of a gnat or mosquito before Bisṭāmī and astonishing them. After his sincerity is proven through such testing, he proceeds to the next heaven.
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> In the first heaven, the angels who are *nūrī*s (luminaries, pure light-spirits) protest the presence among them of an Adamite as they recite heavenly liturgies. In the second, an angelic commander displays a lush garden with a flowing river surrounded by flying angels, teaches Bisṭāmī mystical knowledge of heaven and earth, and immerses him in a river on whose banks were trees of light, on each branch of which a nest of angels and in each nest an angel worshipping. Bisṭāmī refuses the temptation to stay.
>
> In the third heaven is a four-faced angel with one face following the heavens and weeping, one looking toward earth and warning, one looking to the right and praising, and one looking up and sending troops upward with praises. It spreads its wings, each tuft of which contains a candlestick that would darken the sun, and invites Bisṭāmī to rest under his shade.
>
> In the fifth and sixth heavens, angels of overwhelming brilliance and majesty confront the mystic and tempt him. In the seventh, 100,000 ranks of angels, each with a banner of light under which is a

million angels, the height of which is a distance of 500 years, led by a certain Baryā'il, trade greetings with Bisṭāmī.

Allah turns Bisṭāmī into a bird, each feather of which is as long as the distance from the East to the West a million times over. He flies through kingdom after kingdom, veils after veils, plaza after plaza, sea after sea, until he arrives at the angel of the chair (*kursī*) who receives him with a column of light. When he takes the column, the heavens and all that was in them are shadowed by his *ma'rifa* (mystical knowledge), and are lit up with his longing. He is received by angels with eyes equal to the number of stars of the heavens with a light flashing from each eye and glowing. He arrives at the great sea upon which was the throne of the Compassionate and the majestic angels and Cherubim are again reduced.

Allah says, "to me, to me," and then "*O Ṣāfī* (chosen one) come close, look down from the heights of my splendor and the plazas of my light and sit at the carpet of my transcendence and see the subtleties of the vessels of my creation. You are my chosen one, my loved one, and the good of my creation."

Bisṭāmī melts like lead. He is quenched from the spring of subtlety with the glass of intimacy. He is transformed into a condition that cannot be described. Allah brings him nearer to him than the spirit is to the body.

The spirit of every prophet receives him. The spirit of Muhammad greets him: "Allah has preferred you over many of his creatures, when you return to the earth pronounce peace from me upon my community and given them sincere advice." He continues "until I became as I was when there was no being and there remained only the real, without being, without 'between,' without 'where,' without relation, without how."

This account is laced throughout with detailed evidence of the interaction between the Islamic Mi'rāj tradition and the Jewish Merkavah and Hekhalot tradition. The four-faced angel reflects the Merkavah and four-faced *ḥayyot* of *Ezekiel*. The angelic protest against a human presence among the luminaries echoes the almost identical protest of angels in the Hekhalot text *3Enoch*. The height of the angels in the seventh heaven is 500 years. What does that mean? Well, in the Merkavah tradition, the distance between heavens or the size of angels is measured in how many years it would take to make the journey. Thus the height of the Merkavah angel Sandalphon is, exactly, the equivalent of a journey of 500

years. Just as the angels in the highest heavens are reciting in 70 languages in Bisṭāmī's Mi'rāj, so they are reciting in 70 (or 70,000, the numbers expand) languages in *3Enoch*. The same numbers indicate large distances (variations of 100,000, with the possible addition of more zeros) and the number of eyes in the angels.[12]

Numerous other thematic, terminological, numerical, and imagistic ties between this Bisṭāmī Mi'rāj and the Merkavah-Hekhalot could be mentioned. In number, complexity, and precision, they provide overwhelming evidence in contrast to the tenuous parallels drawn with Vedānta. What this evidence reveals, however, is not simply an intrusion of Jewish mysticism into Islam, but rather an interreligious negotiation and interaction. While many of the items are immediately recognizable from the ascensions of Moses and Enoch in rabbinic and Hekhalot mysticism, the story has been transformed in important ways. The fire imagery of *3Enoch* is replaced by an imagery of light. The military hostility of the angels in *3Enoch* has vestiges in references to ranks and formations, but the angels choose blandishment over direct attack. The final stages flow directly into classically Sufi accounts of mystical union, with a reference to the column of light that is found in the vision of Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 896), and an account of *fanā'* as melting like lead that brings into the account both the phenomenological and lyrical sensibility of Sufism.[13] The liturgy is not the kedusha but the *tahlīl* (*lā ilāha illa llāh*—no god but God). Finally the references to the beloved, and to the lover's *sirr*—a word that can mean both secret and the inner, secret place within the heart—open up the entire account to the world of Islamic love mysticism. It is from this *sirr* that the longing and light flash up in each case, allowing the mystic to resist the angelic temptation, pass the test, and avoid the trap of taking the particular mode of vision or experience, however grand, as ultimate.

The issue of thrones and who is sitting on them is central to both the Bisṭāmī Mi'rāj above and to the Merkavah/Hekhalot ascents. The Sahlajī Mi'rāj cited by Zaehner as Vedāntic is centered precisely on the issue of the throne: "I plunged into the oceans of *malakūt* (the realm of pure ideas) and the veils of deity (*lāhūt*) until I reached the throne, and lo, it was empty; so I cast myself upon it and said, 'Master, where shall I seek thee?' And the veils were lifted up, and I saw that I am I, yea, I am I. I turned back into what I sought, and it was I, no other, into which I was going" (Z 113). Throughout Merkavah/Hekhalot tradition, the approach of the mystic to the divine throne was viewed with fear. What was the image seen there: God, the mystic himself, an angel, or a devil? At the summit of the ascent, where normal boundaries of identity blur, are the four possibilities not blending into one another in a way that provokes terror? In *3Enoch*, Enoch is transformed into Metatron, the great angel (who also seems to retain his human essence) and is seated on the divine throne and given mastery of the universe. Then (in a passage some scholars suggest may be a later addition by those uncomfortable with such an enthroned human "lesser god"), Metatron is dethroned and punished. He is punished not because of something he has done,

but because others have mistaken him for the "greater God" to which he is, in form at least, identical.

The fear of and desire for mystical union shown in the Merkavah-Hekhalot tradition has a different set of features from Islamic *fanā'*. In the Merkavah and Hekhalot ascents, there is no melting or annihilation of the human. The human is often transformed, sometimes with shamanistic rigor, as when Enoch is turned into fire before being transformed into Metatron. But the union, insofar as it is achieved, is a union of perfect duplication: two images on two thrones exercising two identical royal dominions. The entire question of who is seen by the mystic on the celestial throne is filled with fear: is it God, angel, human, or Satan? The visions are in danger of being a deception, and the mystic who is deceived suffers serious consequences, in particularly if he mistakes the polished tiles of the divine throne for water.[14] In clear conversation with Merkavah ascent stories, the Bisṭāmī Mi'rāj avoids the problem faced by Metatron by making a Qur'an-based distinction between the chair-throne or footstool (*kursī*) and the regal throne proper (*'arsh*). Bisṭāmī arrives at the angel of the chair (*kursī*), who receives him with a column of light. When he takes the column, the heavens and all that was in them are shadowed by his *ma'rifa* and are lit up with his longing. He is received by angels with eyes equal to the number of stars of the heavens with a light flashing from each eye and glowing. He arrives at the great sea upon which was the throne of the Compassionate and the majestic angels and Cherubim are again reduced. The "angel of the chair" is in a safer position than Metratron, since the throne of the Compassionate (*ar-Rahman*, a major divine name) is separated from the *kursī* by a great sea. This solution is not final; the approach to the throne is a moment filled with fear and danger throughout Sufi ascent literature, but we can clearly see how the Merkavah tradition allowed the Sufis in this case a language with which to engage these issues in their own way, sometimes subtly, sometimes explicitly changing features of the Merkavah paradigm.

This text, which from the point of view of comparative mysticism is of "no interest," has now offered a version of the Bisṭāmī Mi`rāj definitely rooted in an interaction between Sufis and Jewish mystics, the strongest evidence, by far, of such an interaction. Beyond demonstrating a cross-cultural interaction more decisively than Zaehner's Vedānta thesis and shedding light on aspects of the allegedly Vedāntic Mi'rāj texts (such as the anxiety over the throne) cited by Zaehner, this version of the Mi'rāj of Bisṭāmī also opens up a new way of viewing religions and their interactions with neighboring traditions. Because of the sustained and detailed nature of the parallels, we can see more clearly the complex process of cultural negotiation. Some elements from the other tradition (in this case Judaism) are kept, some dropped, some transformed. The negotiation turns around a guiding concern involving the role and status of the human being (as challenged by the angels)[15] and the issues, dangers, and adventures of the mystic at the point of mystical union. What occurs is not influence in the sense of penetration of one

culture into a passive and docile subject culture. Instead, we find an interreligious negotiation involving sympathy and antipathy, attraction and repulsion, and most of all, selection and transformation. In the case of the heavenly ascent, we see a competition among Jewish, Islamic, and Christian writers to appropriate in the most powerful manner for their own tradition a partially shared cosmology and mythology of ascent.

Transgression and the Secret of Love

Zaehner bases much of his argument for a passive reception of Vedāntic monism on the claim that the monism was obviously anti-Islamic and even blasphemous from an Islamic perspective. But Zaehner's key texts are taken from collections of *Shaṭaḥāt*. *Shaṭaḥāt* are words uttered in a state of mystical trance (*wajd*) or other momentary condition. Those who composed collections of *Shaṭaḥāt* assumed that the words were uttered by mystics beyond the conscious control of their faculties, and that these words might be strange, trangressive, or apparently blasphemous.[16]

Like other traditions, Islam has a place for some statements or acts that transgress the normal boundaries of tradition. Both the maintenance of the boundaries and the transgression of them are part of the larger tradition. In a famous poem of Ḥāfiẓ, the poet-persona announces that "He is an infidel to love who will not worship wine."[17] Wine is forbidden and ritually polluting. The worship of any deity other than God is the primary human error, *shirk*. The worship of wine puts the two violations into a mutually compounding blasphemy: not only is another god worshipped, but that god is the symbol of ritual pollution. Ḥāfiẓ's poem also removes any easy allegorizing of the wine by referring in the same context to both the wine of earth and the wine of eternity. Yet this poem has been read and loved by Muslims throughout history. Indeed, such a verse is not unusual. Wine worship, idolatry, and other transgressions are the warp and woof of the lyrical tradition that binds together Muslims from various cultural-linguistic worlds, the same or similar transgressive tropes being central to Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and other love lyrics.[18] An apparently blasphemous saying in a collection of *Shaṭaḥāt* may not be the discovery that Zaehner proclaims, but rather a reflection of the literary genre of *Shaṭaḥāt*, just as poetic proclamations of wine drinking and idolatry reflect the genre of love lyric in which such transgressions are not only allowed but encouraged.

Synchronically, the sayings of Bisṭāmī indicate contact with at least one non-Islamic tradition (Judaism) and possibility another (Vedānta) or three (if we accept Zaehner's vague analogies to Buddhist texts), and perhaps either Christianity or Magianism, making four. What do the multiple faces of Bisṭāmī—or of the multiple Bisṭāmīs (the Merkavah vision of four *hayyōt* each with four faces may be more apt than any single, historical Bisṭāmī)—have to do with such interactions? How do these traditions serve as vehicles for a dynamic interaction of

Islam with other traditions rather than foreign penetration into a passive subject? How do they fit into the history of Islam's self-definition through interreligious relations (through both sympathy and antipathy) extending back to the reflection of such relations in the Qur'an? Diachronically, we can ask how best to approach *Shaṭaḥāt* when they are embedded, through the process of their transmission, within successive layers of interpretation; how the apparent threat and blasphemy are addressed; and why Islam did not, as Zaehner would have wished, simply reject and exterminate such allegedly alien influences. The fear, attraction, and controversy concerning mystical union, as reflected in the sayings of Bisṭāmī, are found at the intersection of the sayings with other traditions (and the negotiations over the boundaries of that relationship) and the layering, over centuries, of interpretive frames.

Consider, for example, the vision of the tree of unity as a cheat. Even if we were to stipulate that it was borrowed from Vedānta, questions would arise: What did the Sufi tradition make of that borrowing? How is an element from another tradition selected for incorporation and how is it incorporated? Is its meaning altered through the change of context and other forms of adaptation, and if so, how is it altered? Many of Bisṭāmī's sayings on the topic of mystical union concern the temptations of false visions and false unity. The deceit of the tree of unity may refer to a vision that tempts a particular mystic to interpret a momentary condition as ultimate. There may be other ways of interpreting the labeling of the tree of unity as a deceit, but the only partially recontextualized nature of *Shaṭaḥāt* prevents any interpretive closure.

Although the *Shaṭaḥāt* are only partially contextualized and remain beyond interpretive certainty, they possess clues to a deeper cultural and religious code. A crucial clue in Bisṭāmī's sayings is the reference to "the secret" or "heart-secret" (*sirr*). To understand the heart-secret and the wider dynamics of the Sufi tradition of mystical union in which Bisṭāmī's sayings (whatever their source) are located, we need to turn to wider dialectics of love in Islam. In interpreting the heart-secret, we are led to what is perhaps the single most misunderstood aspect of Islam as a religion and as a civilization.

According to Zaehner, before Bisṭāmī's conversion to Vedānta, he had had a loving and personal relationship with the Allah of the Qur'an. But after his conversion, Bisṭāmī saw love itself, along with ritual acts of piety that would express his love, as a screen. Zaehner writes of this elder Bisṭāmī, noting that "having reached this supreme eminence, he, like his Indian teachers, now considered himself beyond the religious law, beyond all ritual acts of piety: 'He does not go to Mecca, Mecca comes to him'" (Z 107). Here Zaehner makes a casual reference to Mecca coming to Bisṭāmī, but he provides neither the text nor the unusually rich immediate context for Bisṭāmī's saying. When we examine Bisṭāmī's dialogue in full, we find it anchored in an intertextual world of love mysticism and what might be called love dialectics. The dialogue reads:

> [A man comes to Abū Yazīd and says]: "I was told that you walk on water and on air and went to Mecca between the call to prayer and the *iqāma* (standing of the worshippers in the mosque at the call to prayer) and made the prayer motions and then returned." Abū Yazīd answers: "O suffering one. What you have recounted has no gravitas. If a believer is given that, he is given what is given a bird that has no reward or punishment. But a believer is greater before God than a crow. What you have recalled about my goings between the call to prayer and the *iqāma* to Mecca—why even some Jinn (genies) travel in a similar period to Mecca." [After reciting a hadith about the Jinn traveling to Mecca,] Bisṭāmī continued: "If a believer is given that, he is given what is given to some of the Jinn, but the believer is more honored before God than the Jinn." Bisṭāmī becomes agitated and shouts: "The true believer is one to whom Mecca comes and circumambulates his heart and returns, and he does not even notice it, as if he were taken." (Sahlajī 123–24)

Bisṭāmī's response is grounded in two classic Sufi themes: the criticism of mystical wondermaking and showmanship, and the theme of the Kaʿba coming to the heart of the believer. Both of these themes are central, for example, to the sayings attributed to Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 801 C.E.), the same Rābiʿa that Zaehner associates with the love mysticism allegedly abandoned by Bisṭāmī. In one episode the ascetic and mystic Ḥasan al-Baṣrī challenges Rābiʿa to a duel of magic, performing his prayers on water. Rābiʿa answers by performing her prayers while floating in air. Rābiʿa then says to Ḥasan: "Master, what you did, a fish can do, and what I did, a fly can do. The real business is beyond both."[19] In a similar episode the ascetic Ibrāhīm al-Adham goes to Mecca making a *rakʿa* (full prayer movement) at each step, taking fourteen years to make the journey. When he arrives, the Kaʿba is gone. The former slave Rābiʿa has also journeyed to Mecca, but she finds the Kaʿba waiting for her outside the town. Rābiʿa dismisses the Kaʿba, proclaiming that she did not come to see the house, but to see the lord of the house. When Ibrāhīm al-Adham is told that the Kaʿba has gone to see Rābiʿa, he is enraged that it would desert him for a former slave and a woman, while he, the great sage of his era, had made the *ḥajj* to Mecca "on his eyeballs."[20] Zaehner's Vedāntic interpretation of Bisṭāmī's claim that he did not come to Mecca but Mecca came to him ignores the themes and genre of Kaʿba dialogues of which Bisṭāmī's words are clearly an example.[21]

In further support of his claim that Bisṭāmī has abandoned the mysticism of love, Zaehner cites another saying of Bisṭāmī concerning the Kaʿba: "The first time I [Bisṭāmī] made the pilgrimage I saw the house [the Kaʿba], and the second time I made it I saw the Lord of the House, but not the House, but the third time I made it I saw neither the House nor the Lord of the House" (Z 117, Sahlajī 79). Zaehner concludes: "This presumably means that once the mystic has achieved a

condition in which he is devoid of all attributes, he passes beyond the personal God into a purely featureless form of existence, the 'nirguṇa Brahman' or 'Brahman without quality' of the Vedānta." Bisṭāmī's movement from seeing the house to seeing the lord of the house reflects the logic of Rābiʿa's dismissal of the Kaʿba; the Kaʿba is neither the deity nor the beloved. Bisṭāmī's statement that then he saw neither the house nor the lord of the house reflects a classic love dialectic in Islam. The desire of the lover is so intense that if and when he actually finds himself in the presence of the beloved, he is rapt out of consciousness or faints; he never in fact sees the beloved.

The path into the vast world of Islamic love dialectic might seem to be a path to nowhere. According to Zaehner, Islam has no concept of love and whatever themes of love exist within it are imports from Christianity. Zaehner writes:

> Allah, like the Yahweh of the Old Testament, is essentially an active God; he is not the timeless Absolute of philosophy. He is God who deals with men, not something in which the soul can be absorbed. Islamic mysticism, however, taking over many of its leading ideas from Christianity, sees in God the eternal Beloved who draws the soul towards himself in an ecstasy of love, and in the ultimate phase of this love God can say to the soul *Yā anā*, "O thou I." (Z 113)

Zaehner presents no evidence or argument for his claim that Islam borrowed love in general, and mystical love in particular, from Christianity. He simply asserts that the issue was already addressed by Margaret Smith's proof of the Christian origin of love in Islam (Z 92). But Zaehner misrepresents Smith's argument. Smith examined the Christian influence on early Islamic ascetics, but she proceeded cautiously on claims about the Christian origins for Sufi love mysticism.[22] At this point it is necessary to acknowledge the elephant in the room—the vast tradition of love dialectic within Islam and particularly within the poetic traditions of Islam, a tradition that thoroughly informs Sufi dialectics of love from the very first recorded Sufi texts to the present day. Zaehner is not alone in ignoring or dismissing this central mode of Islamic discourse; indeed, the existence of this world of love dialectic, so vital and central to Islamic societies, is seldom acknowledged in popular accounts of Islam, textbook analyses, or scholarly discussions.[23]

The notion of *shawq* or longing, cited by Zaehner as an element in the proper pre-Vedāntic mysticism borrowed from Christianity, is, in fact and to the contrary, directly rooted in the love talk (*ghazal*) of the Islamic world. Poetic expression of *ghazal* is grounded in part in the *nasīb*, the amatory first section of the classical Arabic ode (*qaṣīda*) that along with the Qur'an was one of the wellsprings of Arabic and Islamic literature. The *nasīb* itself begins with the *aṭlāl*, the ruins of the abandoned campsite of the lost beloved, one of the campsites in her

journey away from the poet. These ruins announce the loss of the beloved and at the same time recall her lost presence. At the moment that the poet recognizes in a seemingly anonymous abandoned campsite the traces of his beloved, the poem is born.

The *aṭlāl* motif originated among Bedouin tribes who would come together for a few weeks in the spring for trade, poetry contests, and religious observances, only to divide up for the long dry season of intertribal war over scarce pasture grounds. Romances were inevitably broken off. This separation (whether experienced biographically by the poet or used as a communal symbol for various modes of loss and exile) is the premise of the love poem as it first emerged within the classical tradition of Arabic poetry, even as it moved far beyond the Bedouin world of central Arabia.

In the *nasīb* the infinity of desire is modulated through the inability of the poet-persona to control the flow of emotion, memory, and association. A single reference to an aspect of the lost beloved—the perfume of her hair, the taste of her mouth, the shine of her inside teeth when she smiles—was enough to generate extended digressions, under which is found partially veiled yet intense sensuality. At the same time, the memory of the beloved evokes a poetic recalling of the stations of her journey away from the poet, a movement that ritual reflects inversely, the movement of the pilgrim, station by station, toward the object of the pilgrimage. Created here was a homology between the formal rituals and movements of the pre-Islamic and later Islamic pilgrimages, including the hajj, and what later poets would call the "religion of love." The religion of love was based upon a poetic analogue to the formal religion, sacred scriptures, rites, pilgrimages, and myths of creation and the end of time. This poetic analogue reflected both archaic analogies between rite and poetry and the later, more self-conscious poetic modeling of Islam. This analogue continued to evolve with developments in poetry and Islamic culture.

The rigid boundaries between sacred and profane that missionary and orientalist writers imposed upon Islamic tradition led them to deny the existence of love in Islam. In the Islamic world love is not part of a divine revelation. Instead it exists as a central force encompassing all aspects of life, sacred and profane. References to love (as opposed to intimacy, affection, compassion, caring, and empathy) are relatively few in the Qur'an. The major sources for love discourse were poetry and romances based upon poetry. This world of love was invisible to Zaehner because it did not fit his definition and boundaries of religion, yet this love discourse was central to Islamic spirituality from the beginning.

Compounding the difficulties facing Christian scholars in recognizing love in Islamic discourse was the positive value of celibacy in Christianity, the attribution of celibacy to Jesus, and the common divorcing of Christian love from erotic love. In contrast to the early church fathers, the Qur'an and Sunna (Islamic tradi-

tion based upon the Qur'an and life of the Prophet) give no spiritual value to sexual abstinence. Conversely, erotic love and sexuality were never viewed as an impediment to spirituality; indeed, they were acknowledged as basic elements of life and existence. Qur'anic judgments on sexual matters are directed not toward any theology of celibacy, but toward a social harnessing of what was acknowledged as a valid, God-given aspect of humanity. Some Qur'anic passages depict the reward of the afterlife as including erotic satisfaction, depictions that caused scandal or bemusement among missionary scholars accustomed to a tradition based, at least in most interpretations, upon the life and death of a celibate God/man and, at least in explicit teachings, an emphasis on a specifically desexualized paradise. In addition to its unambivalent acceptance of sexuality, classical Islamic spirituality also offered an unambivalent embrace of eros, assuming the existence of erotic love as it was articulated through one of the world's deepest traditions of love poetry. For those who identify authentic love as agape rather than eros, this love tradition may have been particularly difficult to recognize or accept.

The Qur'an distinguishes between two kinds of inspired speech: the prophetic speech revealed by God and the poetic speech revealed through desire (*hawā*). In the Sura of the poets, the Qur'an sardonically remarks on the poets who wander perishing in every *wādī*. Although often viewed as a global condemnation of poetry, these verses reflect the self-depiction of the love poets themselves. The Qur'anic discussion of poetry refutes suggestions that Muhammad was a poet, making clear distinction between prophecy and poetry, between the world of religion or faith (*dīn*) and the world of love poetry most often associated with *dahr* (time or fate). Classical Arabic poetry is indeed in apparent tension with Qur'anic morality. The poetry originates from an illicit or otherwise impossible love, glorifies the drinking of wine, and in the heroic section of the *qaṣīda* celebrates tribal battle ethos. All three activities were prohibited in the Qur'an. Yet these manifestations of love or passion, however transgressive they may seem by the standards of formal religious law, were never expunged from Islam. The preservation of the pre-Islamic poetic heritage is due to one of the great anthropological and philological projects of human history: the collection, validation, and analysis of the pre-Islamic oral poetic traditions by urban, literate Muslims during the first four centuries after Muhammad. The formal justification for both the preservation and the continued study of the poetic tradition by Muslim scholars was mastery of the Arabic language, the medium of Qur'anic revelation. The studies of the poetic heritage, however, extended beyond textual issues to an incorporation of the poetic tradition into every sphere of Islamic civilization. And while poetry has sometimes served a polemical role as an antitext to the Qur'an, just as often it has converged with religious sensibility to a degree well beyond serving as a mere vehicle for ideas existing separate from the poems.

The fascination with love lyric extends back into the life of Muhammad himself. When Muhammad was confronted with poets opposing his message in

the name of ancient tradition, he did not respond by condemning poetry. Instead he surrounded himself with poets, including his famous companion, Ḥassān ibn Thābit. At the prophet's death, Ḥassān composed a classic *nasīb*-elegy, that is, an elegy in which the beloved is deceased. In this case the *aṭlāl*, the traces of the beloved's abode, became the house and prayer-yard of Muhammad in Medina, and the beloved was of course the Prophet, inaugurating thirteen centuries of love songs to Muhammad shared by mystics and nonmystics alike. Not long after Ḥassān's elegy, the deity itself was figured as the beloved, and Islamic devotion was incorporated into the language world of the love poem.[24]

In the first century of Islam, a new form of independent love poem, the *ghazal*, was derived from the *nasīb*. In both the erotic *ghazal* of the foundational poet Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a and the very different *ghazal* genre associated with Majnūn Laylā, the poet is slain by the beloved, although the tone of the former—witty, seductive, and ribald—differs from that of Majnūn Laylā. In the poems of Majnūn and others of his school, the poet-lover loses his mind and finally his life in the infinite reaches of his desire for the beloved. At Majnūn's point of madness, Laylā is everywhere and nowhere. Majnūn speaks to the trees as Laylā, the rocks as Laylā, the streams as Laylā. He is driven out of his wits (*'aql*) into bewilderment (*ḥayra*). He wanders aimlessly (*hā'im*) in the desert until his destruction (*halāk*). Nothing can save him. He is the kind of poet described in the Qur'an as wandering lost in every *wādī*.

Desire in Islamic literature tends toward the infinite. To the extent that the beloved is near, the poet is disoriented or even driven out of consciousness by the intensity of the nearness. To the extent she is distant, the persona of the poet-lover is equally in a state of longing. As the poet Dhū al-Rumma (d. 735 C.E.) stated, in a verse reappropriated throughout the tradition, "she is the cure, she is the disease."[25] Or as many poets announced, hers is the wine of the finest vintage, which as it quenches, makes the thirst burn more.

Such infinite longing makes the *aṭlāl* a symbol not only for love but also for exile. Throughout Islamic civilization, the ruins of the beloved's abode become the traces of the lost homeland. The poet in Cordoba finds them in the *wādī*s of Arabia. Another poet in Andalus sees them in the ruins of the Caliph's palace in Cordoba and the vanished glory it represents. After 1492, poets saw them in the lost *wādī*s of Andalus itself. Palestinian poets find them in the traces of their lost villages and homes. The central Qur'anic theme of human dislocation finds a perfect refrain in the longing and exile of the poet-lover. The infinity of desire is reflected in love lyric by the unlimited digressive trajectory of the description of the beloved. The rhetoric of description masks the inability of the poet to capture the beloved through any definition of characteristics. The more the poem speaks of the beloved, the more the poem digresses through a chain of interior associations away from any image of her whatsoever. Ultimately what is described (and evoked through reverie incited by remembrance of the beloved) is

the lost garden, the beloved's symbolic analogue. The beloved remains just beyond the grasp or possession of language.[26]

Islamic theologians attempted to categorize hundreds of terms for love, placing some in the spiritual realm and others in the earthly.[27] In Islamic poetry, however, distinctions in love and its hundreds of varieties do not always fit a static spiritual/earthly divide, even for the writers who categorized them in the first place. Thus, although in some places Ibn 'Arabī categorizes terms according to various levels of spiritualization, in his love poetry he collapses those distinctions of spiritualization, while keeping subtle distinctions among love-terms in intensity and metaphoric associations.[28] Eros respects no boundaries; ultimately it cannot rest divided into religious eros or nonreligious eros. By itself, as a driving force, it is neither moral nor immoral. In context, it can be the force behind the Sufi *himma*, the persistent aspiration or motivation leading the mystic to ever-new stages of the journey.

The master lyricist Abū Nuwās (d. 810) played a role in the development of expressions of love. By focusing upon the wine song and integrating the power of the *aṭlāl* into the wine itself, Abū Nuwās helped create a source of memory and longing more interculturally permeable than the bedouin *aṭlāl*.[29] Through the motif, essential features of the *nasīb* and *ghazal* found their expression in Persian, Ottoman, Urdu, and Golden Age Arabizing Hebrew poetry, as well as hundreds of other more localized cultural-linguistic worlds.[30] The wine, like the *aṭlāl*, contains opposites. It causes the drinker not only to forget, but also to remember. As an age-old vintage (from the time of Noah, from the time before creation), it represents eternity. Yet it also represents the moment of happiness snatched from the reign of time and fate.[31] It is earthly, but it is mystical. The poetics of the wine of love resonates through to the present day, most popularly exemplified in the songs of the Egyptian master Umm Kulthūm.[32]

No one was more transgressive than Abū Nuwās. Not only did he celebrate wine, drunkenness, and seduction and compose graphic depictions of illicit sex acts, he placed this poetry of the depraved (*mujūn*) within his own "religion of love," referring to his sex acts as wielding the sword of *jihād* or as carrying out five prayers, and constantly playing with the notion of repentance and repentance from repentance. Abū Nuwās's symbolic world of love, exile, and wine reflects the world of the sacred in an ironic mirror, a kind of photographic negative in which all the elements remain but the valences are inverted. At the same time, the themes and specific language of Abū Nuwās and wine-poets were reappropriated and inverted by religious writers and reflected within their context.

Sufi poets made the most ancient vintage celebrated by Abū Nuwās a central theme of their meditation on the intoxication of the mystic with the divine beloved. For example, the Egyptian Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235 C.E.), nicknamed "master of love" (*sulṭān al-ḥubb*), was known as a love poet before he became famous as a spiritual guide. According to tradition, during a Sufi session of *dhikr* and poetry,

someone recited verses of a lover's complaint that on the day of separation his tears had left his heart behind in the land of the beloved. Upon hearing the verses, Ibn al-Fāriḍ went into *wajd* (ecstatic trance). The intensity of his *wajd* in turn convinced those around him that he was indeed a *wali*, an intimate friend of God.[33]

Ibn al-Fāriḍ's experience illustrates a frequently resisted relation between love lyric and Islamic spirituality. A verse, indistinguishable from other *nasīb* lyrics and incapable of being categorized as either sacred or profane in itself, provokes the future shaykh into a state of ecstatic trance. The state of *wajd* is itself the mystical analogue to the state of *ṭarab*, that indescribable state that occurs when tears well up in the eyes of even the most jaded drinkers. The wine of the poets was circulated in the cup of the *saqi* (wine pourer) and in the *bayt* (abode, verse) of the poem, both of which were associated with the turning heavenly spheres of fate. The lover drinks to forget, only to find that at some point, the effect of the wine reverses itself and causes deeper remembrance. In this way, Abū Nuwās, his antibedouin polemics notwithstanding, remains true to the paradox of the ancient Arab poets such as Labīd, who as they drink to forget their lost love, protest (and protest too much) how well they have forgotten her, whom they address by name, sometimes addressing her in direct apostrophe.[34] And Ibn al-Fāriḍ, recognizing the paradoxes and power of Abū Nuwās's ancient vintage, was led to recite his own celebrated wine verse: "In memory of the beloved we drank a vintage that intoxicated us before the creation of the vine."[35]

The secret (*sirr*) out of which Bisṭāmī's inner longing surges at each confrontation with the angels is both revealed and concealed within the wine. That secret pervades the tradition of love lyric in Islam. The *sirr* is the secret or mystery of love, the location within the human heart in which that secret resides and is kept hidden, and the faculty through which love is sensed. The *sirr* is hidden from others. It is hidden from fate. The mystery and paradox is this: insofar as the lover finds himself with the beloved, he is no longer conscious and thus the consummation is a secret even to the lover. At this moment for Sufis, the moment of annihilation (*fanā'*) of the ego-self, the deity appears in the heart-secret (*sirr*) of the mystic who is no longer there. The secret is the place of union, but the union is always in a dialectical tension with the infinite longing.

The heart-secret within the vast panoply of love lyric in the Islamic world might be epitomized in the poetry of two Andalusi poets, the courtly love poet Ibn Zaydūn (d. 1070 C.E.) and the Sufi Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240 C.E.). The verses of both were grounded in the transcultural Islamic poetics of love. Both are famous for their versions of the "religion of love." The two offer an obverse/inverse reflection of the role of love in Islam. Ibn Zaydūn incorporates the entire world of Islamic ritual, theology, scripture, mysticism, and law into his love poetry. Ibn 'Arabī incorporates the long tradition and conventions of Arabic love poetry into his Sufism. In these two cases, the incorporation goes so far that in some

instances poems from the two writers occupy that charged central ground between the poetic (and symbolically sacred) and the formally religious.

Ibn Zaydūn, in poems addressed to his former lover, the princess Wallāda, offered a verse that encapsulates both the power and the apparent blasphemy typical of the love poet: "In desiring you, I play my destiny away/In loving you, I worship."[36] In this verse the beloved is both the destiny (*dahr*) of the lover-persona, as well as the object of his worship. Ibn Zaydūn's longer poem *Nūniyya*, "poem in N," is the most famous love poem in the Arabic tradition, celebrated, among other reasons, for its expression of the religion of love. The poem opens with a reference to the poetic day of separation intensified by allusions to the separation as the Islamic day of reckoning (*yawm ad-din*). As the poem continues, the anguish of love is more and more modulated through the vocabulary of religion, both Islamic and esoteric. Love is the only creed (*i'tiqād*) the poet-persona takes and the only theological/legal opinion (*ra'y*) he follows. The beauty of the beloved is depicted as well through alchemical and astrological allusions to the creation of gold and silver and to the engraving of star-signs on amulets. The esoteric traditions then yield to more formal theological references: She is beyond all names and beyond all attributes, for example, and yet the poet (like the mystical theologian) will use descriptions even as he must deny them. In comparing his previous times with the beloved to his present condition (or their present condition), the lover persona exclaims that their lote tree (the tree over which Muḥammad saw his original prophetic vision [Q 1–18]) has become the tree of skulls found in the Qur'anic underworld, and the waters of Kawthar (the mystical waters of life) have become the drink of the damned (vv. 33–35).

Throughout his *Nūniyya*, there exists a tension between two possible references for the first-person plural. "We" can refer to the poet alone, addressing his lost beloved, through the convention of self-reference in the plural. Or it can refer to the poet and beloved together, evoking a sense of mutuality. Verses from the center of the poem concerning the secret of love draw the tension particularly tight.

Did we not spend the night,
making love our third companion,
when our good luck
weighed on the eyes of our informer,

Two secrets
hidden in the whisper of darkness,
until the morning's tongue
was about to reveal us.

We read our sorrow,
that dawn of parting

as sacred scripture, reciting it
from the verse of patience, by heart. (vv. 36, 38, 40)[37]

Here lovemaking (*waṣl*) is personified as a ghostly presence itself. The *waṣl* has been commonly translated as "union" (and translated as such by Zaehner), a translation that loses the erotic sense essential to the word. Many possible Arabic terms may be used for union, many of them without amatory associations, but *waṣl* is inextricably bound to connotations of sexual union; the common mistranslation of this word turns an erotic allusion into an abstract and dispassionate monism. The power of this spectral personification of sexual union in the *Nūniyya* is enhanced by the tension within the "our" of "our good fortune" between reference to the individual lover or to the lover-beloved relationship that the language conjures.

The moment stolen from the night and from fate is soon lost. The classical dawn of parting with which the poem opens is here combined with allusions to Qur'anic revelation and notions of predetermination (at the hands of either *dahr* or the deity) and the final day of reckoning. Sorrow is learned as a *sūra* (chapter of the Qur'an) and recited by heart. When the poet-persona exclaims that "we read our sorrow," "we" can refer either to the lover only or to both lover and beloved—the same ambiguity found two verses later when the lover protests, "Not by our choice did we / withdraw from so near! / Time's twist, destiny / turned us against our will."

The final verses of the poem deepen the combination of classical *nasīb* and Qur'anic themes within the religion of courtly love. In Islamic mystical thought the end of time or the day of reckoning contains an inversion of the present world. In the afterlife the exterior of each person will become his or her interior. And the inner secret, that which is known by God who sees into the hidden recesses of the human heart, will be revealed. It is no surprise, then, that one of the most cherished love poems in the Islamic tradition ends with an erotic version of the same theme:

Though in this world
we could not afford you,
we'll find you in the stations
of the last assembly, and pay the price.

A response from you would
would be something!
If only what you offered
you gave.

God bless you
long as our love for you still burns,

the love we hide,
the love that gives us away. (vv. 49–51)

What is interior and hidden becomes apparent. Ibn Zaydūn conjures the same inversion as the mystics, but he grounds it in the tradition of *ghazal*. The lovers (or lover, depending on how convincing one finds the poet's desperate attempt at mutuality) hide their secret, yet this secret gives them away.

Our second poet, the mystical writer Ibn 'Arabī, dedicated his collection of love poems, *The Translator of Desires* (*Turjumān al-Ashwāq*), to *Niẓām*, a young woman he met in Mecca, whose role in the poems has been compared to that of Beatrice in the Divine Comedy. When his verses were criticized as salacious, he wrote a preface and a commentary offering theosophical interpretations to each verse, under the principle that the beloved or beloveds mentioned were always and only the one beloved, God. Ibn 'Arabī's theosophical commentary engages one important aspect of the poetry by reading the stations of the lover's journey through the interior psychology of Sufi modes of consciousness. Had the ideas expressed in the prose commentary encompassed the full meaning of the poems, however, the poems themselves would have become superfluous. Ibn 'Arabī's allegorical commentary reveals hermeneutical choices similar to those found in medieval Jewish and Christian commentaries on the *Song of Songs*.[38] His interpretations also reflect a common feature of Sufi commentaries, which emphasize the psychological and theosophical meanings of the love, wine, and stations of longing. And yet throughout the Islamic world, the most cherished poems are often those that refuse to give away or define the love or the beloved in terms of sacred-profane delimitations. Within the Islamic tradition both the eroticism and the need and place for defensive commentary are taken for granted. Both are given their due and their place. The major question posed by the tradition is this: Why are the poems most loved by the religious and the nonreligious alike those in which the identity of the object of desire (divine or human) is as ambiguous as the desire itself is infinite?

Sufis developed a mystical theology that allowed the never-ending discussion between lovers to reflect and be reflected within apophatic mysticism. The effort to depict, describe, name, or evoke the deity led into an interminable series of linguistic self-critiques, slides, paradoxes, and inversions for which the infinite world of love-pleadings was not only a paradigm but also an expression.

The writings of Ibn 'Arabī were at the center of two intersecting trends within the tradition. In his love poems Ibn 'Arabī achieved one of the quintessential expressions of the religion of love (*dīn al-ḥubb*), a "religion" that had been articulated by earlier poets and resulted in various modes and tones of expression. In his mystical philosophy Ibn 'Arabī brought to culmination centuries of Sufi thinking on the ineffability, infinity, and unnameability of ultimate reality, and he provided the most rigorous apophatic critique of dogmatism within the Islamic

tradition. Throughout his writings, the two ineffabilities—the beloved of *ghazal* and the real (*al-ḥaqq*) of theology—compound one another.

In his *Translator of Desires*, Ibn ʿArabī rediscovered the archaic analogy between stations of the beloved's journey away from the poet and the stations of pre-Islamic pilgrimages. Zamzam, for example, is the spring near the Kaʿba that, according to tradition, God opened up for Hagar and Ismāʿīl as they were about to perish in the desert. Ibn ʿArabī writes of Zamzam in terms of the poetic *locus amoenus*, the place of former encounter between lover and beloved. Here the loved ones (or loved one if we interpret her as speaking in the poetic first-person plural) offer the lover a rendezvous:

Meet us at the Zámzam spring,
    after the circumambulation,
near the middle tent,
    near the boulders,

There a man thinned away
    by the fever of love
is cured by the scent of the women
    that made him yearn.

When disquieted
    they loosen their hair
and let it fall
    enfolding themselves in veils of darkness.[39]

Elsewhere Ibn ʿArabī explicitly merges the stations of Kathīb, Laʿlaʿ, and Yalamlam, stations of the beloved's journey away from the poet (and the poet's journey tracking after the beloved) with the stations of the *ḥajj*. References to Zamzam and to the stoning and sacrifice that occur during the *ḥajj* station at Mina are then interiorized:

Two friends—
    turn aside at al-Kathíb
and pull off the track at Lá'la',
    seeking the waters of Yalámlami.

    You will find there
those you came to know.
    To them belong my fastings,
my pilgrimages, my festivals.

May I never forget a day,
    at the stoning grounds at Mína,
at the fields of sacrifice, at the spring of Zámzam,
    what happened!

    Their stoning ground, my heart,
may they cast their pebbles there!
    their field of the sacrifice, my soul,
their sacred spring, my blood.[40]

The sacrifice of sheep made by the pilgrims of Minā (and throughout the world at the same time), in memory of Abraham, becomes the symbol of the lover slain out of his love, the martyr to love, the one lost in *fanā'* or the annihilation of the ego-self.

Ibn 'Arabī's most cherished expression of the religion of love occurs in the eleventh poem of the collection. The final verses have been quoted time and again as an epitome of Ibn 'Arabī's thought:

My heart can take on
any form:
for gazelles a meadow,
a cloister for monks,

For the idols, sacred ground,
Ká'ba for the circling pilgrim,
the tables of the Toráh,
the scrolls of the Qur'án.

I profess the religion of love; (*adīnu bi dīn al-ḥubb*)
wherever its caravan turns
along the way, that is the belief,
the faith I keep. (vv. 11–13)

In most accounts, however, the final verse is left out. Therein Ibn 'Arabī speaks of the great lovers of the poetic tradition as the model for his religion of love and for the lover with the heart receptive of every form:

Like Bishr,
Hind and her sister,
love-mad Qays and the lost Láyla,
Máyya and her lover Ghaylán. (v. 14)[41]

Most accounts also leave out the first ten verses of the poem. These verses begin in the classic *nasīb* style with the lament of the doves reminding the poet of his loss. As the remembrance of the beloved proceeds, the voice of the poet-persona shifts. Suddenly the poet is speaking as the Ka'ba with his beloveds circling his heart as the pilgrim circumambulates the Ka'ba. But what is a house of stone, the poet exclaims, compared to the heart of a man or a woman! In other words, the verses on the heart that can take on every form occur within a poem that is an extended *nasīb*, at the moment in which the greatest Ka'ba is declared to reside within the human being.

In commenting upon the verse "My heart can take on every form" *(qābil li kulli ṣūra)*, Ibn 'Arabī links this verse to his mystical philosophy of the constant transformation of the heart. The infinite cannot be known in any one manifestation in time, and its manifestations are constantly changing. It is the normal and useful activity of the intellect and of language to bind or delimit (*qayyada*) things, to mark out their boundaries. But when this delimitation is applied to the infinite, the primal error occurs: each belief (*i'tiqād*) binds the deity into the image formed within that system and denies the images manifested within other beliefs. The result is intellectual idolatry. A limited idol, the "god of belief," is worshipped not as a manifestation of the divine, but as the deity itself. Such an idolatry is also disbelief (*kufr*) because the one deity is denied in its manifestations in other beliefs.[42]

It is within the heart, specifically within the heart-secret, that the divine manifests itself. The heart of humanity, human consciousness, is like a mirror and prism of God. It both refracts the light into colors (the one God into its various names, attributes, and manifestations) and serves as the locus of divine self-reflection. The heart-secret of each human being is "lord" or the aspect of the deity on which that person is patterned; it is a person's deep essence and the channel through which God manifests himself to that person. The various prophets each represent, in a larger sense, a particular personality type and a corresponding form of religious belief, all of which are valid aspects of the one prophetic tradition culminating in Muhammad. The goal of the mystic is to realize the potential and inner guidance provided by his or her lord (both the general prophetic wisdom to which that person is most intimately related and the more personal and unique intersection of that person with the divine). The ultimate goal entails another accomplishment: openness to the lords of people and other communities. All the lords are manifestations of one God. That one, transcendent God is immanent in each lord fully but cannot be confined to any particular lord or any particular manifestation. These manifestations are, in poetic terms, the beloveds the poet-lover comes to know but must continually let go; or they can be imaged as different forms of the one beloved.

The human being is tempted to grasp or possess the image within the reflection and refraction of the real that occurs within the heart. But the manifesta-

tions of the real are constantly changing. One whose heart (*qalb*) can take on every form is open to continual transformation (*taqallub*), in each moment receiving the new manifestation and giving up the prior manifestation. In poetic terms, the constantly moving caravan of the beloved, always just behind the poet in memory or just ahead of him in the stage of her journey, offers a lyrical understanding perfectly consonant with this mystical philosophy. Majnūn was right in his madness; those rocks, those trees, those riverbeds are Laylā, but she cannot be confined or seized within them. The beloved manifests herself within the heart but is never possessed. The images of her change constantly, driving the lover to bewilderment (*ḥayra*). Playing on the dual meanings of *ʿaql* as either rope or mind, Ibn ʿArabī conceives of the *ʿaql* as the faculty that delimits reality into bound categories. When the lover is driven out of his wits (*ʿaql*), he no longer binds the divine into a particular image. In the shifting images, evoked in the lover's polemic as the fickle states and moods of the beloved, he perishes.

Ibn ʿArabī spoke of his own life as perpetual wandering. For Ibn ʿArabī each moment involves the loss of the beloved, the garden, and each moment entails the promise of a new encounter. But why in so many poems does the poet refuse to identify or delimit the beloved as earthly or heavenly? A clue can be found in the poetic *adab* or proper conduct of the lover. According to the lover's code of conduct, to mention the identity of the beloved is normally considered a betrayal of the love. To ask about the beloved's identity would be indiscreet or obtuse. The *adab* of lovers has a parallel *adab* of mystics. Ibn ʿArabī's mystical thought is apophatic and antiessentialist. To essentialize, to posit a delimited and bound essence, is to create an idol. To attempt to name, grasp, or possess the real or the beloved is to reify the love and ultimately to kill it.

The beloved can never be possessed. As the poet Kaʿb complained, when you attempt to seize her, she slips through your fingers or changes form like a *ghūl* changing through her various guises. The lover's polemic is speech that protests too much. The poet announces that the beloved is fickle, faithless, and deadly. He claims she is both the cure and the disease. He announces he will forget her. He announces he has forgotten her. He boasts of how well he has forgotten her, and the more he boasts, the more he evokes her name. Ultimately it is not the beloved who slays the lover (despite the convention—found in love poetry and popular song in most traditions—of lover's polemic of blame against the beloved). It is longing or desire itself, the human being's most authentic experience of infinitude, that slays.

The argument over the nature of the beloved is, as the beloved in a poem of Ḥāfiẓ complained, a long story, beyond telling.[43] Indeed, it is interminable. For Ibn ʿArabī the real is both transcendent and immanent at the same time: both utterly beyond the world and language, and absolutely immanent, within everything. This paradoxical logic, which Ibn ʿArabī explicitly contrasts with the logic based on the law of noncontradiction, applies only to that realm beyond the

finite. When the human intellect encounters the infinite, it becomes bewildered. It is only through and in bewilderment, at that point where normal intellect is decentered, that the real reveals itself. This encounter must recur in every new moment, in every new form in which the real reveals itself. Ibn ʿArabī is particularly fond of the Qur'anic statement that "all perishes but the face of your majestic, generous lord" (Q 53:26–27). To see the face of God everywhere one turns, without attempting to seize it or possess it, is for Ibn ʿArabī, the path of *taqallub* or perpetual transformation. To attempt to confine the beloved to one category (transcendent or immanent, spiritual or earthly) is to bind.

In recounting the genesis of the *Translator of Desires*, Ibn ʿArabī, considered the grand master (*ash-shaykh al-akbar*) of Sufi thought, relates that as he was circumambulating the Kaʿba, he recited some love poetry. A young woman appeared and objected to each verse in turn. With the final verse, in which the poet speaks of his bewilderment in love, she lost all patience:

> Amazing! How could it be that the one pierced through the heart by love had any remainder of self left to be bewildered? Love's character is to be all consuming. It numbs the senses, drives away intellect, astonishes thoughts, and sends off the one in love with the others who are gone. Where is bewilderment and who is left to be bewildered?[44]

Ibn ʿArabī was both shocked and inspired by the encounter. The mysterious young woman speaks from the point of view of absolute annihilation. But the human being, in space and time, is at best constantly oscillating between passing away (*fanā'*) and the reconstitution of the new self (*baqā'*). Ibn ʿArabī's critic speaks from the realm of the unlimited and serves as a kind of magnet, always drawing the mystic and poet to more openness and further transformation.

Zaehner identified Ibn ʿArabī as advancing intellectually abstract "theoretical monism" that rejected the "older type of mysticism based on the love of God" (Z 180), a truly impressive dismissal of the central and pervasive element in Ibn ʿArabī's thought and sensibility. Ibn ʿArabī does indeed consider Bisṭāmī a central source of inspiration and insight, citing the famous saying: "If the divine throne and what it contained / existed one hundred million times / in the heart of the mystic knower / he would not be aware of it." Ibn ʿArabī comments: "When the heart encompasses the eternal how can it feel the existence of the originated?"[45] This saying exemplifies Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the self-revelation of the deity in the human heart. The self-revelation occurs at the intersection of absolute unity and the world of creation, at the point where creation flows out into the world and, through the polishing of the mirror of the human heart, is taken back up into the divine self-manifestation. It also exemplifies his continuing internalization of Islamic ritual and sacred space. This interiorization, *pace* Zaehner,

does not reject the ritual and sacred space; on the contrary, it takes its power from the very seriousness with which the Kaʿba and the *ḥajj* are treated. Ibn ʿArabī's autobiographical references treat his life as a *ḥajj,* and indeed he spent his life moving from station to station through the major cities and shrines of the Arabic-Islamic world. The love poems of *Turjumān* were inspired during the actual performance of the pilgrimage.

We can now return to Bisṭāmī's saying: "The first time I made the pilgrimage I saw the house (i.e. the Kaʿba), and the second time I made it I saw the Lord of the House, but not the House, but the third time I made it I saw neither the House nor the Lord of the House." Zaehner had commented that "presumably" this refers to nothing other than *nirguṇa brahman*. Bisṭāmī's saying fits squarely into the history of discussions of the *ḥajj* in Sufism, however, and reflects the core Islamic notion of *shawq* as infinite desire and insatiable longing. The young woman upbraids the grand master of Sufi thought at the Kaʿba—not for reciting erotic poetry, but for failing to do justice to the infinite nature of *shawq*. She offers an explanation of the mystic's not seeing the lord of the house that, by the time of Ibn ʿArabī, had resonated down through several centuries of love talk.

Zaehner's inability or refusal to acknowledge the role of the Islamic concept of love in Sufism leads to further contradictions. Zaehner adds to his condemnation of the Advaita Vedānta form of Sufism—allegedly introduced by Bisṭāmī and exemplified by later figures such as Abū Saʿīd Abū l-Khayr and Ibn ʿArabī—a vehement attack on Sufism for accepting the introduction of *samāʿ*, the use of love poetry recited or even sung, in devotions. Yet it is through this love poetry, used in devotions, that the love woven through Islam is most intimately integrated into the heart of Sufi praxis. In the Sufi *dhikr* calm lucidity and, sometimes at the same time, ecstatic trance (*wajd*) occur within a context of chanting the divine names, singing love poetry in honor of God or the prophet, and at times physical movements. In some sessions, the participants form a series of moving lines. As they chant a particular *dhikr* (*allāhu ḥayy*, "God is living," for example), with each chant they face a different participant, then bow and gaze into the eye of the partner before one of the lines moves on and a new face appears. In a session of whirling meditation, there may be two sets of concentric circles of participants holding hands and whirling, one clockwise, one counterclockwise. At the center two participants grasp hands and whirl, the face of each appearing to the other surrounded by the two whirling blurs of a group now united in breathing and in chant. The face of the other appears in startling clarity, and one looks into the eyes of the other in a moment of intimacy that is truly rare. The gaze of love, in its infinite longing, both acknowledges and accepts the gaze and touch of the other but in the whirling movement gives up any attempt to possess the other, accepting the infinite generosity of the gift as well as the necessarily ephemeral nature of any particular manifestation in the world of time and place.

Apologetics in Scholarly Dress

R.C. Zaehner is described in the cover copy of *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* as "rigorously hard-headed in field where fuzziness is endemic," and certainly that is how he presented himself. Yet Zaehner's "Vedānta in Muslim Dress" is a cross-dressing performed not by Bisṭāmī but by Zaehner himself. In order to pose his creation as Islamic, Zaehner carried out the following procedures: (1) he created a central clue by interpolating into a translation an improbable antecedent and holding back from the reader what he had done; (2) he dismissed as "without interest from the perspective of comparative mysticism" the one Mi'rāj of Bisṭāmī that his theory will not fit, a Mi'rāj that is the major evidence for the depth and breadth of interaction between Sufism and Merkavah-Hekhalot mysticism and that also illuminates key aspects of texts he claimed were Vedāntic; (3) he presented Bisṭāmī's remark about "the house coming to him" as monistic antinomianism by extracting it out of the dialogue in which its logic would have become clear; (4) he interpreted Bisṭāmī's remark about not seeing the lord of the house as *nirguṇa brahman* without taking into consideration or acknowledging the several-century tradition of love theory in which the beloved is not seen; (5) he claimed that love discourse in Sufism was alien to Islam and borrowed from Christianity, in ignorance of a world of love talk (*ghazal*) that pervades every aspect and period of Islamic civilization; (6) he interpreted passages attributed to Bisṭāmī that contained key elements of the technical vocabulary of Islamic love, such as *sirr*, without taking into account that vocabulary or acknowledging the discourse in which it was grounded; and (7) he posited with unquestioning confidence a single, historical Bisṭāmī, created a biography of Bisṭāmī that included a dramatic conversion to Vedānta, and categorized the widely divergent sayings attributed to him into preconversion and postconversion experiences—despite his own, albeit brief, acknowledgment of the caution both within the Sufi tradition and within academic scholarship about the attribution of sayings to Bisṭāmī and the uncertainty of their provenance and transmission.[46]

In this regard, Muslim exegetes such as Sarrāj offer a catalog of many of the basic features of careful scholarship neglected in *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism.* In Sarrāj's discussion of Bisṭāmī's *Shaṭaḥāt*, the following principles are used, principles that may well be useful for anyone embarking on the issue of comparative moral evaluations:

1. Acknowledge the genre in question and interpret with the conventions of the genre in mind. In this case the genre of *Shaṭaḥāt* is a genre that by definition presents the blurtings of mystics when they are overtaken by a particularly powerful condition (*ḥāl*); their utterances seem scandalous, obscene, blasphemous, or nonsensical and need to be approached with caution.

2. Present the text and the interpretations most at odds with your own, as fully as possible, before going on to give your own interpretation.

3. Reserve judgment on condemning a person for sayings when it is in doubt that that person actually said them. Sarrāj even went so far as to travel to the region of Bistam and ask the descendants of Bisṭāmī if he said some of the things attributed to him and found they did not recognize the sayings—including one of the key sayings utilized by Zaehner.

4. Before condemning a statement, determine the context in which that statement was made. In most of the *Shaṭaḥāt*, no context is given, in which case it is important to be cautious in interpretation and judgment. Sarrāj gives this example: Suppose someone were reciting the names of God, one of which might be *Subḥānī* (glory to me) and was overheard. The person who overheard it spreads the story that that person said "glory to me!" and must be a blaspheming, ego-inflated megalomaniac. This particularly blatant example dramatizes the need for context in interpretation and especially in judgment, but the range of contextual issues clearly goes beyond such points of overheard prayer, as Zaehner might have done well to consider when he pulled Bisṭāmī's remark about not seeing the lord of the house out of context and proceeded to explain that it presumably referred to the attainment of *nirguṇa brahman*.

5. On hearing an apparently scandalous remark, taken out of context and attributed to someone, never judge that person unless we have evaluated the condition (*ḥāl*) in which the remark was uttered. This principle is based on the standard Sufi notion of the distinction between stations along the mystical path (which are conscious and taken intentionally by the Sufi) and conditions, ephemeral states of abnormal consciousness that "come upon" a person outside of any intention or will and that must never be reified as reflecting anything more than one aspect of reality.

6. Understand that the states and stations are constantly changing. The corollary to the fourth principle above is that the Sufi is constantly changing in his state, and thus no state can represent either the person on which it descends or any permanent truth, but rather the state is a kind of flash that both reveals and blinds. *Shaṭaḥāt* are overflowing utterances made during the most intense and most quickly changing of states.

7. Consider the possibility that when a Sufi in any state speaks in the voice of the deity, that may be a case of the deity acting as proclaimed in the famous hadith, becoming the seeing with which he sees, the hearing with which he hears, the truth with which he walks, and hands with which he touches, and in some versions, the tongue with which he speaks.[47]

This last principle is one that a scholar attempting to trace Vedāntic influences in Sufism needs to bracket, but the other principles represent a basic sketch

of scholarly integrity. Sarrāj calls those who rush to judgment without following the principles above, stubborn faultfinders determined to find fault regardless of the evidence.[48] It is hard to imagine how such faultfinding, especially in the service of the religious triumphalism of a Zaehner, can elicit anything in the religions and cultures under attack beyond a reflexive reverse triumphalism, with the same kind of disingenuous arguments and manipulation of evidence.

To understand the stakes involved with a polemic like that of Zaehner, it is important to keep in mind the intercultural climate in which it occurs. Zaehner's animus is clearly directed toward Advaita Vedānta Hinduism and only secondarily toward the large part of Sufism that he targets (and indeed, much of the discourse on ethics and mysticism seems to have grown out of a polemic between Western and Indian writers). The use of love in service of a missionary ethics is always dangerous; in regard to Islam it is part of a tragic process of polarization that is deep, growing, and deadly. Polarization between Christian and Islamic ideologues is based, on the Christian side, on the use of "love" as a criterion of ethical worth and interreligious comparative judgment: only actions based on love or done out of love (defined in a particular manner) can be considered moral. Apparently immoral actions done by Christians are superior to the same actions done by Muslims or others because they are motivated out of love.[49] The indefinite reduplication of mimetic violence depicted by René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* is a violence that, once begun, has an ineluctable logic of polarization, breakdown of hierarchy and difference, and a cycle of killing and revenge that leads both sides to destruction.[50] Over the past fifty years, Islamdom and Christendom have been sliding into another round of mimetic violence, in word and in blood; for every Christian militia carrying out ethnic cleansing and other forms of violence in the name of love, there is an equal and opposite militia carrying out what they believe is their own morally superior brand of violence.

Religions have achieved impressive results in fostering constructive human interactions within a shared religious community but have largely failed in extending such values to the religious other. It is this ability to acknowledge the other, especially the religious other that must be the core value of any ethics, particularly in a post–Cold War world in which religious difference, frequently across a self-defined East-West divide, has taken over part of the geopolitical East-West conflict as a resonance chamber for violence. This does not mean that hard questions cannot be asked; on the contrary, there may be ways of asking the hardest questions most constructively within a relational, as opposed to oppositional, ethics.

I do not know whether it will be possible for religions to acknowledge the face of the religious other, or whether a relational ethics, which is the only ethics I can imagine that is not part of intellectual war, is possible. The following remarks are exploratory.

A Few Observations toward a Relational Ethics of Mysticism

1. It is an obvious point, but one that seems to be frequently ignored or forgotten: if any one religious or mystical tradition allowed a better moral life, that is, an appreciable ability of the human being to overcome the classical limitation and patterns of violence to which it is prone, the superiority of that tradition would be overwhelmingly self-evident and would require no apologetics; many would race to convert to it. The modes of violence, inequality, repression, and alienation in different societies may vary, but it is hard to find any religious tradition that shines forth with a real moral breakthrough in human interaction.[51]

2. Insofar as the discussion of mystical union and ethics has been framed by those, such as Zaehner, who pit one religion against another, or construct essentialized types of mysticism with one superior to the other—who in Ibn 'Arabī's words bind reality into their own constructions and "call one another heretics and infidels" and "curse one another"—ethics has been turned into apologetics.

3. To the extent that we can make a new start, we might start from the premise that no single religion or type of mysticism can be singled out as having a problem. We might, instead, consider the possibility that different religions and types of mysticism have different strengths and weaknesses in relationship to actual human behavior and are best considered in relation to one another.

In China the Confucian concern with order, purification of names, hierarchies, and intergenerational respect is in relational balance with the tendencies associated with philosophical Taoism that promote spontaneity, freedom, and being one with the Tao. This balance may work better in some contexts than others. In a world of injustice and violence, it has proved no panacea. Yet it is possible to imagine that a purely Confucian society might be trapped into the structures it attempts to purify but does not challenge. Conversely, a society based upon the Taoism of Lao Tse and Chuang Tse would be prone to anarchy. It may be that the Taoism of Chuang Tse does not exist without a Confucianist world (or another rule-centered, cataphatic substitute for it) as a foil. It may be, in fact, that the two types of thinking are symbiotic. One tradition guards against the violence that occurs when names are misused and hierarchies violated, the other traces the core of violence to the act of naming itself and views names and distinctions as inherently invidious. The most scandalous and apparently inhuman statements of philosophical Taoism are made precisely within this conversation and interplay with Confucianism. Similar interactions might be found between the apophatic and cataphatic traditions throughout the Abrahamic religions (with the proviso of course that pure apophasis and pure cataphasis do not exist), but that relative emphases and a complex spectrum, sometimes varying widely within

a single writer, are all that can be discovered. In Islam, we might ask if those areas where Sufism has been repressed or exterminated (Saudi Arabia, contemporary Afghanistan, Sudan, Iran, and militarized areas of Chechnya) may show signs of, among other things, the loss of such interaction.

4. Immediate, apparently common-sense judgments should be approached with caution.

4a. Missionary polemic frequently labeled religions such as Islam "fatalistic" on the assumptions that those who believe in predetermination will be less inclined to act in the world and that Muslims are monolithic in their views on predetermination and free agency. In fact, belief in predetermination and the notion of one sole divine agent can result not only in fatalism, but also in a liberated sense of activity and renewed energy, an energy that is released by the notion that—as one self-help artist said he learned from a Christian preacher—if one believes that Jesus is the source of activity and all salvation, one cannot fail (since Jesus is the only real actor), regardless of how much rejection one encounters. Similarly, the *inshallah* (God willing) principle, whereby in every act the human recognizes that the outcome depends upon the divine will, has led some Muslims to fatalism and lethargy, and others to truly extraordinary examples of human endeavor.

4b. The role of the shaykh or guru in a mystical tradition that encourages, at a certain point, amid certain conditions, the abandonment of will and the loss of ego-self can be the source of abuse. Yet for every corrupt shaykh there is a corrupt priest or preacher within a theistic background, and it is hard to see how one is ethically better than the other.

4c. Neither eroticism nor repression of the erotic serve as direct indicators of morality. Zaehner, for example, takes pleasure in pointing to the practice in some Sufi circles of Platonic gazing at young boys, citing accusations that such gazing led to abuses. Characteristically, however, he says nothing about the devastating problem of child abuse among celibate priests and the complicity with that abuse by institutional authorities that cover it up and inform the victims that they either are fantasizing or are to blame.

5. The fact that ultimate reality is seen in a nondual manner does not mean, in practical terms, a loss of concern with the world. Zaehner assumes that because the mystic Abū Sa'īd Abu l-Khayr was alleged to have been one of the most radical nondualists in Sufism, he and his followers must have had little ethical connection with the world (Z 118). Once again, Zaehner leaves out a piece of counterevidence; in this case, the attribution to Abu l-Khayr of the establishment of the Sufi *khanqah*, based upon ten principles, the ninth of which (feeding the poor and the stranger) is believed by some to be one of the major social service institutions of the medieval Islamic world, with guest houses for wanderers, soup kitchens for strangers, and scholarships for needy students.[52]

6. Within the context of the admission of the ethical danger in dualistic thinking, it is fair and constructive to engage the ethical danger in nondualist thinking.[53] Such apophatic moments in classical traditions occur within a cataphatic context in which the distinctions and hierarchies, the names and the attributes, are affirmed and rigorously examined. It is within such a context that the moment of liberation can occur. Outside such context, there is no transgression of boundaries because there are no boundaries, and the apophatic moment is indistinguishable from nihilism.

In Sufism mystical union occurs within the following hierarchies of value:

6a. A Qur'anic injunction states that a mote's weight of kindness or a mote's weight of meanness (defined concretely as giving generously to the orphan, the hungry, the stranger, and the out-of-luck) will be what each person faces at the day of reckoning, when all that seems large and secure, such as mountains, seas, stars, and the tomb itself, fall away.

6b. The moral psychology exemplified by Muḥāsibī (d. 857 C.E.), who categorized and analysed the forms and subtleties of egoism and self-delusion, helped found a tradition of psychological self-scrutiny.

6c. The Sufi *ṭariqa* or path has a hierarchical series of stations (*maqāmāt*), the structure that maintains the possibility of a moral and spiritual progression for mystics who, as their mystical practice intensifies, are beset by ever the more powerful "states" or "conditions" (some of which result in *Shaṭaḥāt*) that oscillate widely and that, if given into as ultimate, can lead to psychological and social devastation.

7. Essentialized religions and essentialist types of mysticism, such as those constructed by scholars, are incompatible with serious ethical reflection when they are reified and treated as if they exist outside of relation. Religions and mystical tendencies exist in relationships. Islam emerged and defined itself in relation to pre-Islamic animism, Christianity, Judaism, Near Eastern cosmology, and other traditions, and this self-definition through interaction has continued to the present. Similarly, various forms of dual and nondual Sufisms grew in conversation with one another and with surrounding traditions.

A constructive ethics needs to be relational. The useful question is not whether type A mysticism is ethically superior to type B mysticism, but what type A can contribute to type B and what type B can contribute to type A (without forgetting that both type A and type B are constructs and that few mystics are purely any one constructed type).

8. The focus upon the motivation of the act in ethical judgment can be dangerous, as the history of the love polemic might suggest, and should be considered in a spirit of self-reflection, in which the good motivation of each tradition or culture has often been at the heart of justifying the most egregious ethical abuses as well as ethically valid acts.

9. Various forms of transgression exist within traditions. Some are cultivated and tolerated and some are rejected. Trangression itself may have both ethical dangers and ethical benefits.

10. Most recent definitions of ethics focus on activist virtues and discount the virtue of avoiding harm. Even if we were to grant the generalization that a nondual metaphysics leads to the neglect of others, that neglect can be an improvement upon the tendency toward the persecution of others in those thought worlds where the other is often recognized as a threat.

11. Relational ethics require dialogical constructions of standards. For instance, how can we compare unilaterally a homocentric ethics as emphasized in canonical Abrahamic traditions with a zoocentric ethics as emphasized in Mahāyāna Buddhism and some Gnostic environments? How can we compare Eckhart's transformative apophatic mysticism, which privileges virtues (and divine attributes) of justice, knowledge, and birth, with Ibn 'Arabī's transformative apophatic mysticism, which privileges imagination, openness to the other, and *shawq* (love, longing)? In the end, we may be less concerned with criticizing one tradition from the perspective of another than with the ways in which traditions might complement, enrich, or challenge one another.

12. Any effort to make a link between ontology and praxis needs a clear method for showing the praxis, including close cultural study of the societies in which various ontologies are alleged to lead to radically different forms of ethos. For example, if we wished to examine the oppositional hypothesis that Sufis we categorize as monistic are, at least in their monism, unconcerned with others, and are, insofar as they engage in *samā'*, morally degenerate, we would need a close study of communities of such Sufis, with detailed analysis of their behavior. In a relational ethics, such studies would be similarly useful, though more complex to develop: For example, how do Sufi communities with an emphasis on mystical union relate with non-Sufi Muslims, in different contexts, and in what ways to they complement, oppose, or ignore one another, and how do they interact with non-Muslims?

Bisṭāmī Who?

Within this dialogical model some possibilities suggest themselves. Thus the radical apophasis of Eckhart and Ibn 'Arabī, which posits a moment of authenticity or justice at the moment boundaries and distinctions are given up (within of course a hierarchy and context of such boundaries), may find a constructive conversation partner in a philosopher such as Emmanual Levinas, whose critique of language echoes many apophatic concerns, but who also centers value in an appreciation of the face of the other. Christian and Upaniṣadic thought, when brought together, yielded a version of loving thy neighbor as thyself that may not have existed in either before and that may well be a valuable addition to both tradi-

tions. Gandhi discovered the *Bhagavad Gītā* in Britain and then rediscovered it when he was being held in prison by the British and used it, through a focus on the notion of slaying *rajas*, to transform a text apparently justifying war into a source for nonviolent action. That his perspective on the *Gītā* might have been influenced by Christianity and Islam does not make it any less authentic. Martin Luther King in turn found Gandhi an inspiration, even as he was using the Christian Exodus story, that ends with the God-given commandment to carry out genocide against the Canaanites, into yet another resource for nonviolence.

Similarly, Eckhart's one just act that always has been born and always is being born in the human soul, and Ibn 'Arabī's self-revelation of the deity in the human heart that must be reearned or regiven in each moment, may be enriched by Levinas's focus upon recognizing the face of the other. The experience of the face of the other within a praxis of mutual respect and support that occurs in Sufi *dhikr* may also find itself in constructive conversation with Levinas's thought.[54] In all such conversations, the hardest and most rigorous questions can be asked fairly, because the premise of such a conversation is that both parties are willing to question themselves as well as the other, even as they are willing to find what is valuable in the other tradition, as well as in their own.

We know less about the historical Bisṭāmī(s) than we do about the historical Jesus. Whatever he or they may have believed personally (if indeed he or they existed historically) is of little relevance for the study of mystical union in Sufism or for comparative mystical studies. What matters is what the tradition made of the sayings attributed to Bisṭāmī. The *Shaṭaḥāt* are an important example of how a tradition selects material out as transgressive and how it continues to debate the interpretation of that material. If we subscribe to the view that any tradition, insofar as it is a living tradition, is a sustained argument over the meaning and boundaries of that tradition, then the study of Bisṭāmī's *Shaṭaḥāt* would make an excellent starting point for pursuing this question within Sufism.

In this regard, a starting point might be the discussion of *dhikr* (remembrance) by the moral psychologist Muḥāsibī. Muḥāsibī first presents the debate between several groups regarding the object of *dhikr*. One group states that one should remember God only, and not look to the world of the self or look toward the temptations of Satan, on the grounds that whatever we focus our attention on is in some way our god. Another group maintains that unless one looks to the world of the ego-self and Satan, one will not be prepared when they set their snares. After exploring these and other intermediate positions, Muḥāsibī cites the following analogy in support of the first position, that the goal of religious life should be total immersion in remembrance of God. When we sleep, he tells us, and wish to wake at a certain hour, we wake. Now when we are asleep, we are completely unconscious, and yet there is something in us that is awake enough to wake us at the appropriate time. If we can trust ourselves to sleep in such circumstances, then we can trust ourselves to immersion in remembrance of God, trust-

ing that something in us will alert us to the snares of the ego-self and Satan without us needing to keep them in our mind.[55]

In the anecdotes of Qushayrī (d. 1075 C.E.) about earlier Sufis, the question is extended to the issue of the five prayers: if we are totally immersed in remembrance of God, how will we remember to carry out the five prayers? Examples are given of mystics utterly "gone" (Bisṭāmī-style) who, oblivious to everything else, rouse themselves at the right moment for each of the five obligatory prayers.[56] This issue of the relationship of mystical union to Islamic orthopraxis was a major preoccupation among early Sufis.

The examples of Muḥāsibī in the area of moral psychology and Qushayrī in the area of orthopraxis could be extended to issues of ethics as defined in the modern context. How can someone who no longer even sees the lord of the house be expected to see and care for the human being next door? Does the analogy work? In what circumstances and under what conditions? How does the fact that the experience of union (or lovemaking, *wasl*) is never, from the perspective of the human being in time, sustained, affect the issue? In a philosophy of constant oscillation between duality and unity, as in the philosophy of Ibn ʿArabī and others labeled monists by earlier scholars, what are the implications for ethical life of the union and of the return, of *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ*, passing away and the return or enduring within the world, respectively? How does the "speed" of such oscillation affect behavior toward other embodied living beings? How does this oscillating mysticism of the heart that takes on every form compare in this regard to some of the earlier mystics who seem to speak as if mystical union/lovemaking was more permanent? These are some tentative questions; a relational ethics would suggest that both the tradition in question (as in the examples from Muḥāsibī and Qushayrī) and the tradition with which it is in conversation will have resources and insights to share.

Any effort to express the nondual leads to an infinite cycle of sayings and unsayings, each unsaying positing a dualism that must be unsaid in turn. A monistic world is, from the perspective of human beings in time and place, static and solipsistic, an eternal One loving and knowing itself. But fortunately for us (and perhaps for that One), such a static and solipsistic being is continually dissolved by the impossibility of stating it (thus as apophatics from Plotinus to Ibn ʿArabī would show, even in the term "loving itself" dualisms of subject and object, subject and predicate, turn such a One into a many). The nondual is posited but in the act of being posited, its position is unsaid and undone. Whether or not it exists (and even the term "it exists" would betray its nondual nature), the effect of a mystical movement is toward the devolution of reference and intention into an infinite process. Neither the one nor the reference to it can be complete or perfect (in the grammatical sense of complete act). In the erotic love of the *nasīb* and *ghazal* in Islamic traditions, it is not the object of the love that is affirmed as infinite (no object can be affirmed as infinite, since by its nature as object it is

bound off and delimited from the subject). She (to use the most common gender convention) cannot be possessed. It is desire as reflected in the infinite regress that is found to be infinite. As Ibn ʿArabī suggested of lovers wandering (*hā'im*) through the endless *wādī*s of the desert, such love is an emblem or a clue. Each human knows this infinite longing. When the love of the poets and the apophatic wandering of the theologian are combined, they reinforce one another and compound the dynamic. If there is a One or an infinite and whatever that might mean, this never-ending movement is, from the perspective of time and space, the sign. Majnūn Laylā wandering through the *wādī*s talking to trees, rocks, and rivers as Laylā, or himself perishing, and Bisṭāmī answering when spoken to that he (Bisṭāmī) is no longer there, are within Islamic traditions exemplars of those who have vanished not into a union with a static one, but into an open-ended journey within the heart-secret (*sirr*).

Notes

I wish to thank Jamel Velji and Janet Bunde for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.

1. R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969, originally published in 1960). Referred to in all subsequent citations simply as "Z" followed by the page number. For other discussions of Zaehner's claims concerning Bisṭāmī, see A.J. Arberry, "Bisṭāmīana," *BSOAS* 25 (1962): 28–37, and especially Muhammad ʿAbdur Rabb, *Persian Mysticism: Abu Yazid al-Bistami* (Dacca: Academy for Pakistan Affairs, 1971), 185–211.
2. All references to Zaehner's translations from Sarrāj will include the page numbers from Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fi t-Tasawwuf*, edited by Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, Gibb Memorial Series no. 22, 1914), hereafter referred to simply as Sarrāj.
3. Gramlich translates the passage with an indication that the "thou" in "thou art that" refers to Bisṭāmī."So dass deine Geschopfe, wenn sie mich sehen, sagen: 'Wir haben Dich gesehen, dass also du das bist und ich nicht dort bin.'" Richard Gramlich, *Schlaglichter über das Sufitum: Abū Naṣr as-Sarrājs Kitāb al-lumaʿ* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 522. Gramlich's method is to place after his translation of each saying or segment a summary of the controversies within Sufism over the text, its possible variants, and its interpretation, along with references to echoes of the text at hand in other Sufi writings. In this case, he offers no indication that *any* reader (either hostile or sympathetic to Bisṭāmī) ever considered reading the text in any other way.
4. In one story, a man spends years looking for Bisṭāmī and finally finds his house. He knocks on the door and Bisṭāmī opens it. The man says he would like to speak with Bisṭāmī. Bisṭāmī answers that he would like to speak with Bisṭāmī as well, but he hasn't been able to find him for some time.

   There may ultimately be a way of making Zaehner's proposed antecedent plausible, but if there is, it would need an explanation that would take into account what is the overwhelmingly likely antecedent.
5. The parallelism is there to be sure, although the use of the "thee thou" language may make it sound even more impressive in English that it actually is, since the *Chāndogya*'s formula of "that thou art" has become part of the English philosophical lexicon, and thus Zaehner's translation of the Arabic using "thou art that" gives the phrase a rareness and a specificity beyond what it would otherwise have.
6. In the *Śvetāśvatara*, the text Zaehner finds most significant in this regard, the tree is only used as an analogy: "Two birds, closely linked companions, cling to the same tree. One of them eats its sweet fruit, while the other looks on without eating. On the same tree a

person, sunken and deluded, grieves at his impotence. When he sees the other, the Lord contented, and his greatness, his grief departs. From that (Brahman) the Master of maya emits the whole [world]—metres, sacrifices, ceremonies, . . ." (4.6.10).

7. Sahlajī, *An-Nūr min Kalimāt Abī Tayfūr*, Sahlajī's collection of *Shaṭaḥāt* of Bisṭāmī, found in Part I of A. Badawi, ed., *Shaṭaḥāt as-Sūfiyya* (Cairo, 1949).
8. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (*The Unveiling of the Conceiled*), edited by V. Zhukovsky (1336 A.H), 306.
9. Zaehner concludes with a paraphrase of the long account in Sahlajī, which he presents as an effort to water down the monism of Bisṭāmī by having Bisṭāmī, at the culmination of his ascent, refuse the identification of himself with the deity.
10. Further, Zaehner writes (Z 98), the most notorious statement attributed to Bisṭāmī, *Subḥānī* (glory to me) "is absolutely blasphemous to Muslim ears, and nothing remotely comparable is recorded of any of the Sufis who preceded Abū Yazīd, and once again we find the explanation of it in a Hindu source: for the Sanskrit equivalent of these words occurs in the *Bṛhatsannyāsa Upaniṣad*, where we read *mahyam eva namo namaḥ* "homage, homage to me."
11. I have given a full translation in M. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 242–50. For further comparative discussion, see M. Sells, "3 Enoch, the Hekhalot, and the Islamic Hermetic Tradition," unpublished paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Anaheim, Calif., November 1989, and idem, "Bewildered Tongue: The Semantics of Mystical Union in Islam," in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith*, edited by Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 101–8.
12. For a discussion of the Merkavah tradition, see David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 1–358. The provenance of the Hekhalot texts is notoriously difficult to pin down, as is any standard version or division of a fluid manuscript tradition, although that tradition has been divided up into various books such as *3Enoch* (also known as *Sefer Hekhalot*). For one version of *3Enoch*, see *3Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch*, edited and translated by Hugo Odeberg (Cambridge, 1928; New York: Ktav, 1973). See also the translation by P.S. Alexander in James Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 223–315.
13. For Sahl at-Tustarī, see Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: the Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustarī* (d. 283/896) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980).
14. This is the very mistake made by the Bilqīs, the queen of Sheba, in the Qur'anic account of her experience in Solomon's palace.
15. For the Qur'anic depiction of the rivalry and the superiority of Adam over the angels, see Qur'an 2:30–34, 15:28–31, 38:71–75.
16. For a discussion of the genre of *Shaṭaḥāt* (or *Shaṭḥiyāt*, the alternative term), see Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985).
17. See Ghazal #10 in *The Green Sea of Heaven: Fifty Ghazals from the Diwan of Hafiz*, translated by Elizabeth Gray (Ashland, Oreg.: White Cloud Press, 1995), 59.
18. An instructive example is the Persian *ghazal*, filled with references to mystical union and apparently blasphemous themes, that ends with the following verses:

    Open the door of the tavern and let us go there day and night,
    For I am sick and tired of the mosque and seminary.
    I have torn off the garb of asceticism and hypocrisy,
    Putting on the cloak of the tavern-haunting shaykh and becoming aware.
    The city preacher has so tormented me with his advice
    That I have sought aid from the breath of the wine-drenched profligate.
    Leave me alone to remember the idol-temple,
    I who have been awakened by the hand of the tavern's idol.

    The author of these verses was Imam Khoumeini, leader of the Iranian revolution. See Edwin McDowell, "An Unexpected Khoumeini Reveals Himself in a Poem," *New York*

Times, 14 August 1989. The poem appeared in the Iranian newspaper *Kayhan* on 21 June 1989. It was translated by William Chittick for the 4 September issue of the *New Republic*, the same version of which appeared in the *New York Times*.

Khoumeini's authorship of this poem offers us a lesson in tradition and the acceptability or lack of acceptability of differing modes of trangression. The same Khoumeini who accepts and composes in the style of the *ghazal* wine-song passed a death sentence on the author Salman Rushdie for Rushdie's literary portrayal of Muhammad and the Qur'an. Most Muslims do not accept the call for execution of Rushdie but share the general dismay with his writing. Yet most also revel in the tradition exemplified by the Khoumeini verses above.

19. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 161.
20. Ibid., 158.
21. The point here is that the larger literary context must be acknowledged, not that a linear chain of influence be shown. Given the semi-legendary and oral-based nature of the material we have on early figures such as Rābi'a and Bisṭāmī, we cannot establish a clear chronology for the sayings of the early figures which have come down to us in collections written decades or centuries after they lived.
22. Zaehner writes: "In her book, *Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, Dr. Margaret Smith has shown how indebted early Muslim mysticism is, with its overwhelming emphasis on the love of God, to the thought of the great Christian mystics of a slightly earlier time, and, in view of the grave suspicion with which this doctrine of love was regarded by the orthodox theologians, her conclusions cannot be seriously disputed." Smith does not in fact claim that love in early Sufism is a Christian import. She focuses upon asceticism, not love, as a Christian import. And while one could extrapolate from that assertion further claims of Christian influence, Smith remains cautious. In the chapter on love, she refrains from claiming that it is a borrowing from Christianity and goes out of her way to problematize the entire issue by acknowledging that both traditions are grounded in the same late antique cultures. Zaehner's other argument, that some "orthodox" theologians condemned the discourse of love, does not necessarily prove that such love was alien but shows that it was so deeply rooted within Islamic life and thought that some theologians would work hard and fruitlessly to counter its pervasive presence. See Lois A. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: NYU Press, 1971). One indication of the way such love works in Islam is the fact that in areas of the Ottoman world such as Bosnia, many if not most legal scholars were assumed to be *ghazal* poets and were given poetic pen names. To be considered truly cultured, they were expected to compose in the *ghazal* tradition Ottoman, Persian, Arabic, and Serbo-Croatian texts in Aljamiado script. See, for example, Muḥammad al-Khanjī al-Busnavī, *Jawhar al-Asnā' fi Tarājim 'Ulamā' wa Shu'arā' Busnā* (*The Essence of Splendor in the Biographies of the Ulama and Poets of Bosnia*) (Cairo, 1930), an edition of an account of seventeenth-century Bosnian notables. For a brief overview of recent work focused upon the relationship between Islam and the poetic traditions with which it is at times in tension and at times fully intertwined, see Michael Sells, "Toward a Multidimensional Understanding of Islam: The Poetic Key," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (1996): 145–66.
23. In his influential *Love and the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont recognized the paradigm of love in Islam. De Rougemont then placed Islamic love into a fundamental tension with Christian love. For De Rougemont the erotic love of Islamic civilization contradicted what he considered the agape-based and marriage-centered love of Christianity. He was among the few scholars of his time willing to acknowledge what has since been clearly demonstrated—that the boundaries of medieval Islamdom and Christendom were porous, and that the vast tradition of Islamic love just over the Pyrenees did in fact have a close relationship with the courts in which troubadour poetry was developing. Yet for De Rougemont this influence was tragic; he attributed the demise of Christianity to the penetration of Islamic notions of love into Europe.

While De Rougemont saw erotic love as an Islamic import into the Christian world, Zaehner saw mystical love as a Christian import into the Islamic world. The movement is reversed in the two models, but each model presupposes an essentialized and passive tradition penetrated by foreign elements. The host civilizations have no interior logic that would help determine which extrinsic elements would be accepted, rejected, or incorporated and transformed at the same time.

The passive reception model of De Rougemont helped lead him to a distorted understanding of the relationship of marriage and love within Islamic cultures and thus to the bizarre conclusion that romantic love (which he saw as largely an Islamic import) destroyed the ethics of marriage in Christian Europe. The romantic love of the poets of Islam is based upon a structural difference between the love of marriage and romantic love. The vast majority of classical poems are grounded only in the latter, romantic love. In societies where marriages are arranged, romantic love of the poets is traditionally viewed as irrelevant to the practicalities of the original choice of marriage partner. The love, affection, and loyalty of marriage partners develops within the marriage. No evidence suggests that marriage in Islam is any more or less successful in nurturing a successful, long-term, loving relationship than it is in other cultures. The key issue here is that only a confused literalist would attempt to choose a marriage partner on the basis of poetic conceptions of romantic love. The poetic and theological love of the mystics of Islam is based upon the notion of infinite longing and only ephemeral (in this world) realization. Obviously the love between marriage partners (which in traditional Islam is not to be made a matter of public discourse) is based upon continuity and sustained proximity. Muslims have generally been successful in making the distinction; composers and consumers of poems of erotic desire could be and have been, without contradiction, faithful and loving spouses.

See Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, translated by Montgomery Belgion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956). The original French version, *Amour et L'Occident*, appeared in 1939, at a time when many European scholars were vehemently denying the possibility that Islamic culture could have had a major impact on European Christian poetics. For a contemporary critical discussion of many of the issues raised by De Rougemont, see Maria Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), and idem, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).

24. See Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 59–64. Chapters 2–5 of *The Zephyrs of Najd* offer the finest treatment in English of the Arabic *nasīb*. Stetkevych's textured and intricate discussion presupposes some knowledge of the tradition. Those without prior experience with Arabic poetry may wish to consult the fine recent overview by Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of Its Genres and Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 103–203, especially the discussions of love, wine, and mystical poetry, 172–203.
25. See Michael A. Sells, *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 72.
26. For the paradox of description of the beloved, see Michael Sells, "Guises of the *Ghūl:* Dissembling Simile and Semantic Overflow in the Early Arabic *Nasīb*," in *Reorientations: Studies in Arabic and Persian Poetry*, edited by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 130–64.
27. For one example, see Joseph N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979).
28. For Ibn 'Arabī's classification according to degrees of spirituality, see Ibn 'Arabī, *Traité d'Amour*, translated by Maurice Gloton (Paris, 1986).
29. Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1982).
30. For two examples,, see the excellent versions of Punjabi poetry in *Death before Dying: The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu*, translated and introduced by Jamal J. Elias (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and the reflections of the multicultural and

multilinguistic culture of Bukhara in The Ilyas Malayev Ensemble, *At the Bazaar of Love*, CD recording (Shanachie, 1997).

31. For these and other paradoxes, see Philip Kennedy, *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry: Abu Nuwas and the Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
32. Umm Kulthūm, the most popular figure in the Arabic world in the twentieth century, showed the classic confluence of poetic and Qur'anic worlds in Islam. Her father was a village Qur'anic reciter, and she grew up reciting the Qur'an herself. Her songs, edited by herself, are masterful integrations of classicist love poetry with contemporary Egyptian and Arabic life. Her popularity is due in part to her ability to combine Qur'anic and poetic sensibilities; within her singing style can be heard cadences of Egyptian Qur'anic recitation. This combination of poetic and Qur'anic knowledge earned this peasant girl a reputation as a master of Arabic and a paragon of cultural authenticity. See Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthūm, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
33. See Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Farid, His Verse, and His Shrine* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 25.
34. See Sells, *Desert Tracings*, 40–41.
35. See Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*, 11.
36. Translated by Michael Sells from Ibn Zaydūn, *Dīwān* (Beirut, 1957), 13, verses 3, 8–9. See Michael Sells, "Love," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, al-Andalus*, edited by Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129. For a fuller treatment of the "religion in love" in al-Andalus and in early Arabic poetry, see the entire "Love" essay, cited above, in *al-Andalus*, 126–58.
37. See "'To al-Andalus, Would She Return the Greeting,' Ibn *'*Zaydūn's *Nūniyya*," translated by Michael Sells, in Menocal, Scheindlin, and Sells, eds*., al-Andalus*, 491–96.
38. See, for example, Ibn 'Arabī's contemporary Ezra Ben Solomon. Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Other Kabbalistic Commentaries*, selected, translated, and annotated by Seth Brody (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications), 38–146.
39. Translated by Michael Sells, *Stations of Desire: Love Elegies from Ibn 'Arabī and New Poems* (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2000), 64. For the Arabic text, see Ibn 'Arabī, *Turjumān al-Ashwāq* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1956), 33–34. Note that in the transliteration of Arabic terms in the poetry translations, I have used acute accents to indicate English stress accents, as opposed to macrons in transliterations of prose passages. The macron indicates a quantitative, rather than stress, accent and is thus not compatible with the rhythms of contemporary English poetic idiom.
40. Sells, *Stations*, 55. Ibn 'Arabī, *Turjumān*, 20–24.
41. Sells, *Stations*, 70–73 Ibn 'Arabī, *Turjumān*, 41–44. For similar themes in the Ottoman and Persian tradition, see the brilliant translations in Walter Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmed Kalpakli, translators, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), especially the poems of Naili; and in Paul Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1998).
42. See Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūs al-Ḥikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*), edited by A.A. Affifi (Cairo: Dar Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1956), 1:122.

> "In that is a reminder [*dhikr*] for one who has a heart [*qalb*]" [Qur'an 50:33]
> because of its constant transformation in forms and attributes.
> He [*Allāh*] did not say "for one who has an intellect" [*`aql*]
> For the mind binds [*qayyad*] and limits the matter in one characterization
> So it was not a reminder to one who has an intellect
> And they are the affirmers of a belief
> Who call one another heretics and infidels
> Who curse one another
> "And they have no saviors"
> The God of one has no authority over the God of the other.

For a fuller discussion of this aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, see Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 63–115.

43. Gray, trans., *The Green Sea of Heaven,* 127, poem no. 42.
44. Sells, *Stations*, 7. Ibn ʿArabī, *Turjumān*, 11–12.
45. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ,* 1:119–20.
46. A curious pattern exists among those who pride themselves on being hard-headed and rigorous within some Western academic circles; the accolades are awarded to the extent that the scholarship shows contempt for the subject and subject tradition, and issues such as careful examination of evidence are less relevant. Any effort to understand why another tradition might be meaningful or have something to offer is a ticket to an instant accusation of fuzziness.
47. For a translation and commentary on these passages, with remarks on Sarrāj's method, see Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 212–31.
48. Ibid, 231.
49. The first question I am asked in public discussions of Islam is often "Does the Qur'an preach that one should love his enemy as the Bible does (in the view of the questioner), or does it preach kill the infidel?" The Qur'an does not in fact teach love of the enemy and authorizes the use of force in self-defense. On this basis, an immediate moral judgment is made. A classic example occurs in the work of Jacques Ellul and Bat Yeʿor, two writers who have made influential appearances before Congress as experts on Islam and have been lionized by members of the American religious intelligentsia. The two writers present Islam as by its very nature made up of two forms of violence: "dhimmitude," described as the parasitic enslavement of other cultures and peoples and the draining of their life blood by a religion incapable of cultural achievement itself, and "jihad," the violent penetration of neighboring cultures. These processes are permanent and unchangeable. In his preface to Bat Yeʿor's most influential book, Ellul concedes that a look at history does not seem to show Christianity to be notably less violent, but then he makes the crucial distinction: Christian violence is done out of passion and is therefore ethically superior. See Bat Yeʿor, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude,* with a foreword by Jacques Ellul, translated from the French by Mirian Kochan and Davit Littman (Madison: Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1996), first published as *Le Chretienté d'orient entre Jihad et Dhimmitude* (Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1991).

    Passion indeed. In the recent genocide in the Balkans, the major mythology motivating the Serb militias was the portrayal of the Serb martyr Lazar as a Christ-figure, his death in battle against the Ottomans in 1389 as the Serbian Golgotha, and the Muslims in Yugoslavia of today as having blood on their hands for the passion and death of the Christ-prince. The Serbian religious leaders supporting the ethnic cleansing continually contrasted Christianity as the religion of love to Islam as the religion of violence, a contrast that was used to justify the attack. Indeed, according to the greatest Serbian religious nationalist writer, Bishop Njegos, it is the very nonviolence and love of enemies of Christianity that makes the systematic extermination of the Turkifiers (Slavic Muslims) not only a necessary but a sacral act. For a discussion of the role of the Lazar story in the motivation of atrocities, see M. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

    It is true that much of the violence in Christianity is perpetrated in the name of passion and even love. Recently, love has been cited as the reason for opposing laws against discrimination and persecution of gays and lesbians and for a new campaign to convert American Jews to Christianity. In the latter regard, a rabbi responded that Jews would prefer a little less love and a little more respect.
50. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).
51. People do flock from one area to another. Thus, people have flocked, to the extent they were able, from the totalitarian regimes of Nazism and Stalinism. But of course, this movement had nothing to do with the subtleties of mystical union. In both cases, people were fleeing from one system grounded in European thought and history to another

system largely grounded in European thought and history. If advocates of the ethical superiority of what they call the West wish to take credit for civic democracy, they should also take credit for the Nazism, fascism, anticommunist mass killings, and Stalinism that grew out of the same cultural milieu.

The recent movement of immigrants and guest workers is a different story. In these cases, people from nations without industrial development move to industrialized societies. These advanced capitalist societies offer wages beyond any possibility in the home regions. They also offer a political, economic, and social system that allows an unusual degree of individual autonomy.

Some argue that the capitalist, civic democracy of the West is based on and limited to what is now called Judeo-Christian civilization. Others argue that it is limited to Christianity. Whatever forces may have spawned advanced capitalism and whether or not the Protestant work ethic or any other religious trend was central to its early development, the situation now is that capitalized, industrialized, and postindustrial societies control most of the resources of the world, most of the commerce, and offer their citizens a certain share in this power and wealth. But many of the immigrants to the industrialized world are themselves Christian. No evidence suggests that Christian immigrants have more trouble than non-Christian immigrants in adapting to and, indeed, cherishing the positive values within the nations to which they have immigrated. Non-Christian immigrants have flourished in business, politics, law, human rights work, all the functioning areas of Western democratic society. Rather than trying to stay aloof from the Western cultures to which they have immigrated, such immigrants often complain of the barriers keeping them from fully participating, particularly in countries such as Britain, France, and Germany.

And yet, even as they do manage to live the life of the consumerist democracy, many feel the loss of the positive values of their own societies: the warmth, the spontaneity, the cultural-linguistic sophistication (in a city like Bukhara the educated often speak not just several languages, but several languages from entirely different language systems). The other side of scattered nuclear families, individualism, and mobility is alienation and loneliness, just as the other side of the warmth of traditional societies' extended families can be a claustrophobic set of boundaries. Many immigrants have returned, wealthier yet unhappy. Fundamentalism (whether in Pakistan, India, or Indiana) is in part a reaction to such alienation, and fundamentalist movements tend to be led not by nativist populists who never left the heartland but by disillusioned émigrés to the West (or from rural to urban areas within the West), particularly those from professions such as medicine and engineering.

Comparing ethics in industrialized societies to that in nonindustrialized societies is tricky. The rates for murder, rape, armed robbery, and suicide in a country such as the United States are astronomical compared to the rates for the same crimes in traditional societies. No evidence indicates that the rate for child abuse and spouse battering is significantly lower in industrialized societies, although statistics in this area are hard to verify for traditional societies. In many cases, aging people in nonindustrialized societies are kept at the center of the family and grow old in dignity and acknowledged wisdom, even as they lack the modern medical technology of their peers—often living out lives of some loneliness—in technologically advanced societies.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the excruciatingly painful trade-offs made by immigrants more than the decision of families from traditional societies in areas such as South Asia (Muslim and Hindu alike) concerning arranged or Western-style marriage. In Western self-perception, arranged marriage is an abomination. And yet there is no evidence that arranged marriages fail more frequently than the less than idyllic Western pattern (with a divorce rate approaching 50 percent). What is evident, however, is that the two systems offer almost no middle ground to the young woman caught between. As an instructor at a liberal arts college, I find myself trying to advise students from South Asian families who are told that the day they graduate, a movement toward marriage is expected. In such systems, younger daughters have to wait for older daughters, and a daughter who rejects the traditional system risks being disowned or at least the emotional threat of being

disowned. Such students are profoundly aware of both the benefits and the limitations of the warm, close, and boundary-full traditional family and the open, free, alienated, lonely, and boundary-less worlds from which they have to choose. No evidence suggests that there is less joy, love, or devotion in their marriages, nor have I found any studies showing the superior happiness, tenderness, or ethical treatment (however measured) among spouses in Western nonarranged marriages.

A relational ethics will attempt to find the positive values in each culture, tradition, or society and learn how different societies might better teach and complement one another. And while it is obvious that totalitarian and despotic societies are often filled with open violence and persecution, the question of whether any major religious or mystical tendency shows any ethical superiority is far less clear.

52. See Herbert Mason, "Abū Sa'īd ibn Abi l-Khayr and the School of Khurasan," in *The Heritage of Sufism,* 2 vols., edited by Leonard Lewison (Oxford: One World, 1999), 1:65–82.
53. Elsewhere I have argued that any nondualism, including apophatic Western mysticism, entails a moral and a cognitive risk at the point where it abandons the hierarchies of values and knowledge necessary for ethical and intellectual life. See M. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 206–17.
54. A proposal for a conversation between Levinas and Eckhart was offered recently by Oliver Davies, "Meister Eckhart and the Language of Being," a paper presented at the Eckhart Society Twelfth Annual Conference, 18 August 1999, Oxford, U.K.
55. Abū 'Abdullāh Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allah [Book on the Observance of the Rights of God]*, edited by Margaret Smith (London, Luzac, Gibb Memorial, 1940), 115–17, translated by Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 186–88.
56. See Qushayrī on Absence (*ghayba*) and Presence (*ḥudūr*) in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 122–24.

CHAPTER SIX

Seeing Inside and Outside the Goddess: The Mystical and the Ethical in the Teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda

by Jeffrey J. Kripal

> *And do you know what I saw? Divine forms! The form of the goddess—in her stomach was a child—she gave birth to it and then devoured it. As much of it as she swallowed, that much became empty. It was shown to me that everything is empty!*—Ramakrishna in *Kathāmṛta* 4.259

Introduction: Inside-Out, Outside-In

Ramakrishna's mystical vision of emptiness raises a number of serious ethical questions for anyone who has ever loved another human being. Everything may indeed be "empty" of lasting substance, a flurry of energies in the belly of a goddess. But this ontological truth hardly helps the human being who chooses to love and become attached to another, be that other a child, wife, husband, sibling, or friend. To what extent can we join these two visions of human experience, one "on the inside," the other "on the outside" of the goddess? Can we "turn the inside out" and harness the mystical energies of emptiness to serve our social, emotional, and moral needs on the outside of the goddess? Or is this impossible and the best that we can hope for is to "turn the outside in" and dissolve these same needs in the mystical belly of the goddess?

Such is the mythological inside-out, outside-in structure of the present essay on the mystico-ethical teachings of the nineteenth-century Bengali saint Ramakrishna Paramahaṁsa (1836–86), whose social teachings clearly privilege the ontological truths "on the inside" of the goddess, and his disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), whose social teachings just as clearly privilege the ethi-

cal, social, and physical needs of his fellow Indians and human beings "on the outside" of the goddess. Taken together, this famous guru and his equally famous disciple, this mystic and this religious reformer, present us with an essentially paradoxical vision of modern Hindu mysticism that simultaneously denies and affirms the possibility of that most rare, unusual, and tenuous of phenomena in the history of religions: a genuinely moral mysticism.

The essay can and should be read as an addendum or appendix to another, Paul Hacker's "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics," certainly the most provocative and probably the most important piece yet written on the subject of contemporary Hindu mystical ethics. Here, in the space of a little more than thirty pages, Hacker demonstrates two theses, one philosophical and one historical: (1) that, philosophically speaking, the traditional transethical nature of Vedāntic monism, whose actionless, relationless unity renders any true ethic structurally impossible, is fundamentally incompatible with what Hacker calls the "*tat tvam asi* ethic," that common Hindu formula which attempts to ground the ethical commandment to love the other in the Vedāntic monistic formula *tat tvam asi* (literally "you [the Self] are that [*brahman*]" but that here becomes "you [the Self] are that [Self of the other person]"); and (2) that, historically speaking, Swami Vivekananda, who first preached this now famous ethic, actually appropriated it not from some traditional Indic text or tradition but from the German Sanskritist Paul Deussen, who in turn borrowed it, again not from any Indian text but from his philosophical mentor Arthur Schopenhauer.

My own essay begins with a brief discussion of Hacker's article and a synopsis of the scholarly literature on the relationship between Ramakrishna's mysticism and Vivekananda's social vision. Then, in order to test Hacker's historical thesis about the modern and predominantly Western roots of Vivekananda's *tat tvam asi* ethic, I examine in the second part of the essay the ethical teachings of Vivekananda's immediate guru, Ramakrishna, and demonstrate that Vivekananda's ethical vision cannot be traced back as far as his own guru, whose mystical teachings grant, at best, only potential support to the Swami's social ethics. Finally, I conclude with my own three-part position on the paradoxical, structural, and historical natures of modern Hindu mysticism as it was expressed in the life and teachings of these two Bengali icons.

Paul Hacker's "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics"

The twentieth-century debate about mysticism and morality that I mapped out in my opening essay likely would have played out much differently had each of the participants read—precognizantly, if necessary—Paul Hacker's "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics." Indeed, it is astonishing to notice, with the proverbial hindsight, just how often the proponents of a moral Indian mysticism call explicitly on the very *tat tvam asi* ethic that Hacker has suggested is a modern, Western-influenced construction. Radhakrishnan, Stace, and more recently Steven Katz,

for example, all rely heavily on this ethic to support their positions that Indian monism is essentially moral, often even quoting Deussen and Schopenhauer in the process;[1] on the other side, Schweitzer, in his usual prescient style, foreshadows Hacker's scholarship with his own critical reflections on the *tat tvam asi* ethic.[2] If Hacker, then, is correct in his conclusions that much of contemporary Hindu mystical ethics is indebted to Schopenhauer and Deussen for its most basic dictum, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to overestimate the impact that his findings should have on the terms, the rhetoric, and the conclusions of this debate.

Paul Hacker was a German Indologist who began his career as a specialist of Advaita Vedānta. Later he would turn his attention to Purāṇic mythology and, most importantly for our present purposes, Neo-Hinduism (*Neuhinduismus*), a term he did not invent[3] but one that he certainly helped to define and bring to some level of critical understanding. Among his more provocative essays is a piece on Hindu ethics and its development through classical Vedānta, German philosophy, and Neo-Hinduism, his "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics."[4] The essay begins with a passage from Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*:

> My real inner being exists in every living being, as directly as it reveals itself to me along through my own self-awareness. It is this recognition, expressed in Sanskrit with the standard formula *tat tvam asi*, meaning "That art thou," that emerges as compassion, which is the basis of all genuine, that is unselfish, virtue, and of which every good action is the actual expression. (273)

At first glance, this idea appears convincing, especially to modern Hindu minds, which are quite accustomed to such reasoning for historical reasons addressed below. Schopenhauer's philosophical use of Vedānta and its monism of consciousness, however, finds little support in traditional Hinduism; indeed, as Hacker the Advaita Vedānta philologist demonstrates convincingly, "there was no trace of its being used ethically, as Schopenhauer used it" in the classical Vedāntic texts (277). How could it have been? As "all vital and volitional features were strictly excluded from the universal One, and eventually banished to the realm of the unreal" (276), the Vedāntic system lacked a structural base for ethical action. Morality may have functioned as a "remote preparation" on the path to the illumination of consciousness, but nothing more (275). Morality, after all, presupposes an actor and an action, and the strict monism of classical Vedānta denied both.

It is nevertheless true that modern Hindus and prominent twentieth-century thinkers have used the *tat tvam asi* principle in precisely the way Schopenhauer wanted to use it; for them, it functions as the ontological base for a specifically Hindu mystico-social ethics, "on the outside" of the goddess, if you will. How

did this confluence of Neo-Hinduism and Schopenhauer's teaching come about? Hacker's answer is as precise as it is provocative: through another German Indologist, Paul Deussen. Deussen was both a recognized scholar of Vedāntic thought and a devoted disciple of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Inspired by his master's thought, he had arrived at a position that tried to harmonize the ethical tenets of Christianity, which presuppose a dualism of God and the human being, and the ontological monism of the Upaniṣads:

> "Thou shouldst love thy neighbor as thyself," says the Bible. But why am I expected to do this, since I have feelings in myself and not in someone else? "Because," the Veda adds in explanation, "in truth your neighbor is your own self, and what separates you from him is mere illusion." (279)

Though more than a little "forced" (279), this attempt to harmonize the ethical system of Christianity and the ontological convictions of Advaita Vedānta would have a long and successful history, especially in the thought and writings of Swami Vivekananda, the first Indian thinker in whose writings the *tat tvam asi* ethic appears.

Hacker traces the development of Vivekananda's ethics through his early lectures and writings and shows that the Swami did not discover the *tat tvam asi* ethic until he met Deussen in the fall of 1896 (9 September in Kiel, to be astonishingly exact). Three days later Vivekananda travelled to England with Deussen, the two of them accompanied by a certain Mrs. Sevier (a disciple of Vivekananda) and her husband. Using Mrs. Sevier's account of the exchanges, Hacker shows that at some point Deussen shared with the party a lecture he had given in Bombay three years earlier in 1893. Deussen's Bombay lecture, it turns out, contained a clear explanation of the *tat tvam asi* ethic. A few days later, Vivekananda, apparently drawing explicitly on Deussen's Bombay text, was lecturing on the *tat tvam asi* ethic, presenting it, like Deussen, as the discovery of the ancient Hindu sages:

> The Vedāntic philosophers . . . discovered the basis of ethics. Though all religions have taught ethical precepts, such as, "Do not kill, do not injure; love your neighbor as yourself," etc., yet none of these has given the reason. Why should I not injure my neighbor? To this question there was no satisfactory or conclusive answer forthcoming, until it was evolved by the metaphysical speculations of the Hindus who could not rest satisfied with mere dogmas. So the Hindus say that this Atman is absolute and all-pervading. . . . Therefore in injuring his neighbor, the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes. (296–97)

Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission would continue to publicize and positively develop the idea, and other prominent religious, cultural, and political figures—Tilak and Radhakrishnan, foremost among them—would follow their "Schopenhauer-Deussen pseudo-Vedānta" (297). The result has been what Hacker, in a moment of rhetorical restraint, calls "a curiosity in the history of ideas": "a European philosopher [Schopenhauer] imputes an association of ideas to the ancient Indians; his posthumous disciple [Deussen] tries to justify his master's notion, and presents his version of it to Indians in general [the Bombay lecture of 1893] and to a Hindu monk in particular [Vivekananda in 1886]; the European philosopher's idea becomes widely accepted in India, so much so that many Indians today take it to be actually Hindu" (305).

Hacker is not kind to such a curiosity. He attributes the influence of Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan on the tradition to their "louder voices" (306) and sees little that is original or even "worth discussing" (307) in Neo-Hindu thought and its syncretisms. Its ethical thought in particular—with its too quick acceptance of the *tat tvam asi* ethic, its insistence on the superiority and originality of Hinduism, and its unwillingness to see the essentially nonethical nature of much of Hindu mysticism—strikes him as an example "of tendentious evasion, nervous haste, and failure to think things through" (307). (Here, of course, we are reminded of Schweitzer, who levelled the same criticism against the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indian reformers.) But most of all, Hacker objects to what he calls "the monstrous *tat tvam asi* ethic" (307), which attempts to graft a Christian-inspired ethic onto a monism that logically and structurally must deny it.

Finally, perhaps lest he sound too harsh, Hacker concludes by recognizing the role that "the memory of the colonial period and the deep wound which it left in the Indian mind" (308) played in all of these hasty syncretisms and logical incongruities. The essay ends with an expression of hope that today, with the forces and impulses of a painful past fading into the distance, Indian thinkers can achieve "a more dispassionate and clear-sighted spirit, and find a new orientation" (309).

Hacker's "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics" is particularly important for our own purposes, and this for two reasons. First of all, it effectively demonstrates the transethical nature of traditional Advaita Vedānta, often taken as the pinnacle of Hindu religious thought and the model for much of Hindu mysticism by such prominent thinkers as Vivekananda and, later, Radhakrishnan. Secondly, Hacker's essay demonstrates that the allegedly ancient *tat tvam asi* ethic represents in fact a significant break or shift within the tradition, one that can only be understood, moreover, within the religious, cultural, and political contexts of colonialism. This latter thesis is especially important, for, as noted in chapter 1, one of the most common strategies for establishing the ethical nature of Hindu mysticism is to invoke the very *tat tvam asi* ethic that Hacker has shown to be a modern creation of the late nineteenth century, and one in fact borrowed from Western

thought. If Hacker is right about his history, such arguments hold little if any logical weight, at least with regards to the premodern traditions.

Later Discussions on Related Topics

But was Hacker right? At least one scholar, Dermot Killingley, has called some of the details of his historical argument into question, pointing out the existence of three passages in Vivekananda's writings that express an analogous idea before the 1896 Kiel meeting with Deussen.[5] Still, two of these three documents are in fact undated, and none of them were likely written before Deussen's 1893 Bombay lecture when the idea was first expressed in print. Killingley thus concludes that, even if Vivekananda had voiced a similar idea before his meeting with Deussen, it is quite likely that the meeting crystallized the idea and acted as a positive catalyst for its development. Moreover, we must read Killingley's criticisms of Hacker in the context of his own elegant argument that Vivekananda's was a "western message from the east," that is, that Vivekananda was far more indebted to Western social, religious, and scientific thought than is often acknowledged.[6]

Another fruitful way of getting at the same question is to look at the ethical teachings of Vivekananda's immediate guru, Sri Ramakrishna. Are Vivekananda's ethical and social teachings grounded in those of his very traditional guru? Or are they a departure from this traditional Indic world, as Hacker suggests? Looking at Ramakrishna's teachings will not close the issue, and it certainly cannot prove Hacker right or wrong in regards to the importance of the Kiel meeting, but it can add significant weight to the more general argument that already enjoys a *very* strong consensus among historians of religions, namely, that Vivekananda's acute social consciousness cannot be easily traced back to indigenous Indic sources and is in fact something of a colonially generated "Western import," or to borrow Killingley's ironic expression for our own purposes, a "western message from the east."

This is an old but nonetheless important argument, witnessing to what Krishna Prakash Gupta has aptly called the persistence of "the controversy on the essential meaning of Ramakrishna."[7] Nor did it begin with modern scholars. Indeed, the debate goes back to the very beginning of the community, where serious differences "often erupted into near confrontations when some of Vivekananda's brother-disciples accused him of importing Western religious motives and methods to sell an unreal and contrived Ramakrishna in India."[8] In terms of Western-influenced scholarship, the controversy dates at least as far back as J.N. Farquhar, who in 1914 attacked Vivekananda for his willingness to sacrifice modern scholarship and historical consciousness to his own ideological agendas—"He is ready to re-write the whole history of antiquity in a paragraph, to demonstrate in a sentence that China, in the East, and Greece and Rome, in the West, owed all their philosophical acumen and every spiritual thought they had to the teachers of ancient India"[9]—and voiced serious reservations about whether

Vivekananda's enthusiastic calls for social service could fit into the conservative patterns of ancient Hinduism, which "does not teach the duty of service at all."[10]

More recently, Norman Adams, John Rosselli, and Gwilym Beckerlegge have posed the same question and come up with very similar—if by no means exactly the same—answers.[11] Adams and Rosselli, for example, emphasize a real discontinuity between the socioethical teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Adams is clear that "the life and teachings of Vivekananda [not Ramakrishna] constitute the basis of the Order today,"[12] that Vivekananda derived much of his social ethic from the Western Social Gospel movement and his trip to America, and that the monism of Vivekananda's "practical Vedānta" is at such odds with "the metaphysical substructure of his ethics"[13] that it threatens to endanger the entire religious enterprise. Adams recognizes Ramakrishna's positive influence but insists that it was the West which gave his final message its social substance: "Although it was Ramakrishna's finding of the Divine in every concrete reality which pointed Vivekananda in the direction of 'practical Vedānta,' it was undoubtedly his Western experience which filled out the substance of the 'practical Vedānta.'"[14] In the end, Adams comes to a conclusion not dissimilar to that of Hacker; the Swami, Adams argues, "failed to show how the phenomena of physical and mental suffering are related to noumenal spiritual reality and thus how to justify from the standpoint of Vedānta the loving service of mankind which he advocated and practiced."[15] That is, there is an unbridgable ontological gulf between the monism of Advaita Vedānta, which knows of no suffering bodies and minds, and the dualism of practical concern for real human beings, which gives itself to these same bodies and minds. Here Adams's thought strongly resembles that of Arthur Danto, who was arguing—at about the same time Adams was writing (1972)—that westerners cannot adopt Eastern meditation techniques without enacting serious ontological contradictions.[16] Thus Adams writes of a basic and irresolvable "ambiguity which arises from a desire to combine the ethical understanding of the West with a basic Eastern philosophy."[17]

Rosselli is even more insistent that there is a "substantial discontinuity between Ramakrishna and the movement that grew up in his name after his death."[18] After a historically sophisticated discussion of the textual sources that concludes with a privileging of Gupta's *Kathāmṛta*, Rosselli discusses Ramakrishna's traditional attitudes toward caste, his fear of women, his thorough training in Tantrism, his delightfully "indecent" expressions, and his fierce rejection of Western-style social reform, Rosselli concludes: "No two ways about it: *contemptus mundi* was Ramakrishna's theme."[19] Rosselli then proceeds through two of the most famous examples of Ramakrishna's alleged social consciousness—his ecstatic utterance to reject compassion for service to man, and his forcing of Mathur, his temple boss, to give away food and clothes to some destitute villagers—deconstructing the traditional readings in each case and demonstrating persuasively that the evidence that traditional commentators have brought forward to present Ramakrishna

"as a preacher of social redemption" is at best "thin."[20] "There is very little evidence," Rosselli concludes, "that Ramakrishan meant to found an organized order—still less that he foresaw for it any mission of social service."[21] Indeed, Vivekananda turned Ramakrishna's priorities "upside down."[22]

Beckerlegge attempts to strike a more conciliatory note, insisting on preserving those strands in Ramakrishna's thought that had the potential to develop in social and ethical directions, strands he thinks Adams and Rosselli neglected. But he too agrees that the traditional position of a broad continuity between the guru and his disciple can no longer be upheld with any degree of historical conviction. "It is being recognized with increasing frequency," he notes in his very first paragraph, "that this view [that Ramakrishna and Vivekananda complement one another] has perpetuated a misleading image which has concealed the true direction of Ramakrishna's teachings."[23] He, like Rosselli, examines some of the most common precedents for Ramakrishna's social concern and finds them similarly lacking: "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Ramakrishna appears to have depended more upon opportunities for social service presenting themselves to him than upon actively seeking out such opportunities as a priority for spiritual growth."[24] Ramakrishna, it seems, "regarded philanthropy with its attendant risks as nothing more than an extension of alms-giving,"[25] and this fact makes it "unlikely" that Ramakrishna ever thought seriously about founding a monastic order committed to active social service.[26] Beckerlegge departs somewhat from Western scholarship, however, in his insistence that Vivekananda's social ideas cannot simply be read as Western imitations but were in fact as much products of his own Indian experiences before his trip to the West; as such, Vivekananda's mystico-ethical teachings and Western ethical philosophies can best be described, to use the terms of Krishna Prakash Gupta, as "elective affinities."[27] Affinities or no, however, in the end Beckerlegge wants to stress what I would call a *hermeneutics of tension*, seeing real and very serious differences between the guru and the disciple while still acknowledging possible links. Such a hermeneutic allows him to read the biography of Vivekananda and the later history of the movement as a creative working out of the structural and doctrinal dilemmas originally posed by Ramakrishna's socially indifferent but ontologically profound mysticism.

My own reading of Ramakrishna's mysticism and its relationship to Vivekananda's later *tat tvam asi* ethic—best captured in his famous slogan "Who serves Jiva [the human soul], serves God indeed"[28]—develops from a very similar hermeneutics of tension. With Beckerlegge, I believe that there are real and important strands in Ramakrishna's thought that *potentially* support Vivekananda's active social ethics. I would point in particular to the saint's Tantric notion of *vijñāna*, that dialectical mystical knowledge that supersedes the dry monism of Advaita Vedānta in its warm embrace of everything physical and emotional in human life, magically transforming the renouncer's understanding of the world as a troubling and illusory "mat of deception" into a now delightful and quite real

(and quite funny) "mansion of fun" (*majār kuṭi*). It was just such an ontological transformation that enabled Ramakrishna to move out of his terrifying monistic states and back into the warm, loving, *and now mystical* realities of his human relationships, or what he called in a more theological, if still delightful, vein God's "play as man" (*nāralīlā*).[29]

But I am also of the opinion that the strands of such a mystical humanism function in the texts only as potential ethical resources; that, although they clearly colored everything about the saint's own personal interactions, they were never developed by Ramakrishna himself in any broadly conceived social direction; and that, moreover, the vast majority of the saint's mystico-ethical teachings lean very strongly—when they do not apocalyptically plunge—in a direction that explicitly denies any kind of stable and organized social reform. In short, I read the historical case of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as a powerful example of my opening essay's thesis that the mystical and the ethical can only exist in paradoxical and structural tension, that they are marked by ambiguity throughout, and that this tension has only increased with the advent of modern consciousness.

Having given away my thesis beforehand, let me turn now to the nineteenth-century Bengali world of Ramakrishna and examine the place of social ethics in its ontological structure.[30] I begin in a garden.

Seeing Inside the Goddess: On the Mystical Emptiness of Ethics

Ram Chandra Datta, Ramakrishna's householder disciple and first biographer, bought a plot of land and planted a garden there. On a December day in 1883, Ramakrishna visited this garden and blessed it with his presence. "You can easily meditate on God here," he said. Ram would call this garden *Yogodyāna*, the "Garden of Mystical Union." A mango tree was growing in this garden. Ram would call it *Rāmakṛṣṇa-bhoga* or "Ramakrishna's Delight."[31] If he had lived to learn of Ram's garden epithets, Ramakrishna no doubt would have been very pleased with his disciple, for Ram's Garden of Mystical Union and its delightful fruit embody in a living form the teachings of his Master, for whom eating mangos was a symbol of spiritual enjoyment, of delighting in God's love and presence in the garden of existence.

According to Ramakrishna, it is for this enjoyment that human beings are born into the world. The purpose of such a lucky birth is not to spend one's life counting the hundreds of trees or the thousands of branches or the millions of leaves (from childhood, Ramakrishna displayed an aversion for math). "What's the use of that?" Ramakrishna often asked.[32] Rather, the purpose of this garden birth is to enjoy the sweetness of its fruit. "Eat mangos!" Ramakrishna shouted again and again (KA 4.112; 2.216; 3.201). Don't argue about the nature of God. Don't worry about what happens to you after death. Who cares? Just "Eat the

mangos!" In another metaphor, Ramakrishna explained that a real drunk does not care about how many bottles are in the wine shop. All he needs is a single bottle of wine to get drunk (KA 3.82). After that, he is unaware of the world's cares. He doesn't care. Ramakrishna contrasted this mystical drunkenness with the pathetic busyness and business of the do-gooders, who actually think they can help the world (KA 3.154). This is all tragically pointless in a garden of mangos, a waste of valuable time that can better be spent on enjoying the fruit.

The famous social reformer, Vidyasagar, once pointed out to the mango-eating Paramahaṁsa that the world is filled with inexplicable evil. The world is most definitely *not* a garden. Genghis Khan captured and killed countless people, Vidyasagar complained, and God just watched—"Whether he exists or not, I have no use for him," the reformer dared proclaim. Ramakrishna had no answer for the reformer, except of course the answer of the mangos: "Can we understand why God destroys? . . . The purpose of human life is to attain this devotion. Ma knows everything else. I have come into the garden to eat mangos" (KA 5.24). This might seem a rather dubious approach to what amounts to a strong intellectual challenge. Running to one's mother, be she human or divine, hardly constitutes an answer to one of life's most perennial questions. Nor will eating mangos, however delightful they might be, rid the world of its Genghis Khans.

But Ramakrishna was not always so silent in the face of evil. After all, the Mother he ran to was herself a powerful reminder of the reality of evil and suffering in the world: lopped-off heads, a skull necklace, and a skirt of human arms are more than suggestive. She, at least, this lover of death, would not let Ramakrishna lose himself in his candy-like mangos. And so, toward the end of volume four of the *Kathāmṛta*, Kālī appears to her child:

> Again the state is changing! Eating the ritual offerings is no more! Truth and falsehood are becoming one! And do you know what I saw? Divine forms! The form of the goddess—in her stomach was a child—she gave birth to it and then devoured it. As much of it as she swallowed, that much became empty. *It was shown to me that everything is empty!* (KA 4.259; italics in original as bold)

This vision speaks, in its own mythological terms, to the problems of evil and suffering. Death, it seems to say, is inherent in the finitude of every created form. And not only is death inherent in creation, *it is inflicted by the divine*. Bluntly, the goddess eats us. We are food. But once eaten, once inside the goddess, all suffering and evil cease, for they are found to be ultimately illusory, relative to the external world of finite forms. Suffering, evil, and death thus make sense only outside the goddess, or perhaps better, in her mouth, halfway in and halfway out, as the child is being eaten. True, the child is born, suffers, and dies a gruesome

death. But inside the goddess, the child does not exist as an independent being. And without a constant subjective referent, suffering, evil, and death lose their painful masks and become part of the all-encompassing emptiness of Kālī's inner nature. Shorn of their finitude in the goddess's stomach, Kālī's children can no longer suffer, for now they are "empty,"[33] shimmering in the bliss that is *brahman*.

This conviction in the ultimate nonexistence of evil and the basic violence of the goddess shows up a number of times in Ramakrishna's teachings and visions, usually in connection with the saint's teaching that "she herself has become everything" (*tinii sava hoechen*). In one scene, Ramakrishna draws some of the troubling implications out of this monistic ontology: "God himself is everything," Ramakrishna begins, "then to whom will he show favor?" A listener grasps the implications of such a world after a song and a similar teaching about the goddess and asks in amazement, "Then she is pleased that we die!" Ramakrishna responds from the inside of the goddess: "Where is this 'you'?" As long as one has not realized God, Ramakrishna goes on, so long will one think that "I am acting." But in truth, everyone is nothing but divine *śakti* (KA 3.200). In a similar scene, the same troubling observation is made: "So in [her] playful game [*khelā*] we die." Once again, Ramakrishna responds (with a smile no less): "Tell me, who is this 'you'?" (KA 5.127). Suffering and death are relative to the *ego*, to the outside of the goddess. Inside the goddess, they are meaningless. In yet another scene, Ramakrishna explains what he sees:

> She has become everything! Whatever people or living creatures I see, all seem to be made of leather—inside them, she herself wiggles their hands and feet and heads! One time, it was as if I were seeing everything made of wax—wax houses, gardens, roads, people, and cows, everything was made of one thing. I am seeing that she herself is the executioner, that she herself is the goat, and that she herself is the wooden stake! (KA 3.249)

Everything is made of the same waxen substance, therefore nothing truly exists independent from every other waxen form. The goddess who cuts the goat's head off is also the goat and the stake that holds its nervous head in place for the sword.[34] Violence lies at the very center of reality, and ritual sacrifice employs it to reveal the ultimate unimportance of any single waxen figure.

Ramakrishna saw these truths in a vision, but he had a difficult time accepting them in his waking life. He acknowledges that if the sacrifice is done according to scripture, there is no harm in killing goats, but he confesses that he cannot watch the violence (KA 5.32; 2.177). Nor does he particularly like the goat meat, but he touches his finger to it anyway, lest he offend the goddess (KA 5.32). He accepted, for he had seen the unity of the world and its violence, but he did not

care to live in it continuously. He much preferred, like most of us, to remain on the outside of the goddess. He did not care to be eaten, like the goat in the temple and the child in the vision.

From Seeing to Acting

This waxen world had other implications, both emotional and moral. When he was fully established in this waxen state, for example, Ramakrishna's normal emotional crises ceased to show their frightening faces. Consider, for example, the crisis of the kitchen minnows. Ramakrishna explains how he used to be troubled by the women's habit of keeping little fish in kitchen pots: he knew that they were doomed. Then his state changed and he saw that their bodies were only cases. "It doesn't matter if they survive, it doesn't matter if they die." A listener takes such a remark to its logical conclusion and asks the saint: "Then one can harm a man! [Even] kill him?" Ramakrishna's answer is brutally consistent: "Yes, in this state it is possible." But, he quickly adds, "this state doesn't happen to everyone" (KA 3.168).[35] On a more humorous note, the saint sometimes tested his more tenderhearted disciples by asking them to kill cockroaches for him[36] or by killing pesty bedbugs in their presence (LP 5.9.9). The ideal of nonviolence (*ahiṁsa*) ended with the exterminator.

The moral implications of such a Tantric world are frighteningly clear. The good and the bad of morality, as well as the pure and the impure of social and religious norms, all imply, again, an ego and an object, or, in most cases, many egos and many objects. Sin and merit, Ramakrishna points out astutely, only exist in relation to the ego (*ahaṁtattva*) (KA 1.116). Or again, sin and its anxiety only exist "from the perspective of the soul" (KA 3.6). But the ego and the soul, at least inside the goddess, are empty. So too are all moral and social norms. Thus one must go "beyond sin and merit, beyond good and evil" (KA 1.116). In the language of Ramakrishna's famous vision, one must be eaten by Kālī, one must be established inside her empty stomach. When the aspirant finally realizes that all talk of "I" and "mine" is false, he sees that "I do nothing at all. I have no fault. I have no virtue. I have no sin. I have no merit" (KA 2.35). Without this "I," all moral categories become meaningless. Again: "*If one knows him, then one has gone beyond sin and merit*" (KA 3.58; italics in original as bold). Ramprasad sang of this realization "beyond good and evil" in his song about slaughter, murder, abortion, and drunkenness:

> If only I could die, Ma,
> with "Durga! Durga!" on my lips.
> How could it be possible, O Goddess,
> that you would not save this wretch in the end?
> I [may] kill cows and brahmins and perform abortions,

drink wine, and kill women.
But [once] I am able to attain the realm of *brahman*,
I do not think of all these sins in the least. (KA 1.29)

As in the Upaniṣads, reality is "beyond good and evil" in the Śākta universe of the goddess.[37]

Ethics: The Necessary Illusion

Granted, the talk of sin and merit is necessary for "the worldly" (*aihikader jāna*), for it assures that human society will remain relatively stable (KA 2.26). After all, without the fear of punishment, human beings would not behave (KA 4.54). The world would be reduced to a chaotic estate with no "bad guy" to keep the tenants in line (KA 2.61). Such talk is particularly necessary for beginners on the religious path. As long as they "face out" (*bahirmukha*) toward the external world—as long as they are on the outside the goddess, we might say—they must believe that there is good and evil, they must believe that there are things to reject and things to cherish (KA 4.54). Without such notions, they would surely stray off the path. In a slightly different metaphor, Ramakrishna spoke of the "play" (*līlā*) of the world needing a villain or bad guy. Without a villain or an adversary, the play cannot go on, the joke is not funny. Just so, Ramakrishna observed in a passage that could serve as the motto for many an academic gathering, the student usually disagrees with his teacher. This keeps the back-and-forth of the tradition moving along. Such keen observations won the saint peals of laughter from his audience (KA 1.48–49). They also influenced the way Ramakrishna looked at his own conflicts. He admitted, for example, that he did not care for Hazra—he was "dry wood"—but he acknowledged that Hazra had a right to exist, for he nourished the play of the world. He was the "bad guy" of the story (KA 1.92), the student who rejected his teacher.

Just as it is necessary that beginners and the worldly believe in moral and social norms, it is also important that they believe in free will (*svādhīna*). Without it, moral and social norms would be meaningless (which, of course, ultimately they are). Granted, there is no such thing as free will. Only God truly acts (*tini karttā*). It is human nature to be a mere instrument (*yantrer svarūpa*) (KA 3.61; cf. 4.17–18). "Responsibility" and "free will" (significantly, the text resorts to the English words) do not exist in this world. The very notion of such things is based on ignorance (KA 1.185–86). Everything is dependent on the Lord (*iśvarādhīna*). Nevertheless, just as fear is necessary to prevent sin (KA 2.39), so too the illusion of responsibility is essential to keep the social world intact (KA 1.185–86; cf. 4.59). A Brahmo visitor asks the obvious question: "If he himself causes [me] to do everything, then am I not responsible for [my] sin?" Ramakrishna never really answers the question but suggests that once one has realized the truth

of nonagency, immorality becomes logically impossible: "He whose faith is right—the Lord is the agent [*kartā*] and I am the non-agent [*akartā*]—does not sin. He who has learned to dance correctly doesn't miss a beat" (KA 4.17; cf. 4.37; 4.59). Here we encounter a text that clearly calls for an ethical reading of mysticism; there is no point in denying this. But it is also worth pointing out that the rhetorical structure of the passage resists any simplistic conflation of the mystical and the ethical. The first sentence claims that the person who has surrendered his agency to God can do no wrong. The second sentence, however, implies something more, namely, that such a person can do no wrong, not simply because he or she has surrendered all agency to the divine (which of course assumes that the divine in question is moral), but also because the person has mastered an ethical discipline. Morality, in other words, is a *learned skill*. Hence the saint compares such moral behavior to dancing—once you have mastered the art, it just happens, seemingly on its own. The analogy, I think, is a good one, since it strongly suggests that, however natural and spontaneous such a dancing morality may look, it is in fact something that at one time required strenuous practice, clear rules, and a considerable amount of socialization—that is to say, it is a social accomplishment, not a necessary mystical conclusion. Moreover, we are never told how to understand all the evils committed by nonagents who have not yet realized their nonagency (are not they too instruments of God and so not responsible for their actions?). Indeed, Ramakrishna's monistic leaning theology precludes such an answer because it does not ontologically recognize human subjectivity.

In another whole series of teachings, Ramakrishna insists that *brahman* is untouched by morals, like the wind that carries good and bad smells but is unaffected by them (KA 2.61). Again, this time echoing the mystical teachings of Jesus (Matthew 5:45), *brahman* is beyond good and evil, like the lamp or sun that shines on everything, good and bad (KA 3.6).[38] Or it is like the snake that carries poison in its body but is unharmed by it (KA 2.161). The world is filled with good and bad smells. The world is a snake that slays its occupants. Again, there are tigers and lions and snakes. There are wicked people and poisonous trees. There are thieves and robbers (KA 1.185–86). Life outside the goddess is difficult and dangerous. But inside the goddess, good and bad, sin and merit make no sense. Like everything else inside, these are "empty" of meaning.

But again, it should be pointed out that Ramakrishna did not want to translate the implications of his Tantric world into a consistent ethics. He realized, I think, the radical nature of such an antinomian vision and rejected it as too dangerous. He once scolded a Vedāntin he met, for example, for justifying his sexual liaisons with the notion that the world is unreal anyway (LP 3.2.38). A similar "monistic affair" can be seen in the humorous story told by Satyacharan Mitra in his *Jīvana O Upadeśa.* The story is about a certain king who, believing that he had realized the truth of the sameness of *brahman*, decides that, since all women

are manifestations of the metaphysical sameness, it is alright to sleep with another woman—she and his queen are, after all, "the same." His wife is not pleased, however, with such profundity and responds by feeding him feces with his vegetables. When he refuses to eat the feces, she points out his hypocrisy and makes him realize that he has not yet realized "the sameness." His metaphysical beliefs, however accurate, are in his case functioning as a cloak for his sexual desires.[39] At other times, when pushed into the logical corner of his teachings, Ramakrishna reacted angrily with *ad hominem* attacks. If God does everything, someone asked, then why is there punishment for sins? The man had a point. But Ramakrishna immediately snapped back with his disgust for those "Calcutta people" who say that God is stained by the "evil of inequality" (*vaiṣamyadoṣa*). "The sons-of-a-bitches see in God what they see in themselves," he growled (KA 1.249).

Ramakrishna thus saw that the very Tantric visions that helped generate his charisma and make him a saint could never be translated into moral or social action. He knew, on some level, that they constituted an "inside" that transcended and transgressed, indeed that *ate,* those very norms. They may have accurately reflected the dialectical nature of existence—the inside and outside of the goddess who gives birth to and then eats her own children—but in the end they had to be rejected for that other more respectable, more proper side of sanctity, the *dharma* of society and religion. Granted, Ramakrishna acknowledged some of the possible implications of this terrifying world (bed bugs could be killed and homicide was possible) but ultimately turned away from its all too clear and consistent logic. Cosmic truth was one thing, human existence another. Perhaps this is why his alternating experiences of pleasure and fear, of acceptance and rejection, never quite fully encompass the dialectic of Tantric ontology. How could they? Here, at least, when the ontological truths of the "inside of the goddess" were translated into an individual human life "on the outside," they showed themselves, not in the grand syntheses of philosophy, but in the alternating experiences of pleasure and fear, of eating and being eaten. They became *ambivalence*.

Ambivalence, yes. But also delight and innocence, the delight and innocence of the five-year-old boy, Ramakrishna's model nature for the fully realized mystic (and no doubt the one closest to his own self-perception). Such a knower (*jñanī*) loses all desire and becomes incapable of harming another. He is like the sword that has touched the philosopher's stone and turned to gold: it can no longer be used for violence. He is truly harmless (KA 4.37). For Ramakrishna, then, it is clear that although his Indic worlds imagined other possibilities and sometimes even suggested them in its songs and doctrinal structure, full mystical realization precludes the possibility of violent or grossly immoral action. Waxen monism and the mystery of sacrifice may reveal separate individuals to be empty of any true existence, ethics may only exist in relationship to the illusory ego and for the purposes of an ontologically deluded society, and *brahman* may be genuinely

beyond all good and evil, but the realized soul can do no genuine harm. By virtue of his childlike, golden nature, the full mystic *is good*.

But can he *do good* in the sense of an active engagement with the world or, more radically still, in terms of systematic social action or reform? Can the realized soul, whose nature has become that of a five-year-old, enter the adult world of society and act effectively to address it and, if necessary, even change it? This question is addressed below.

The Sleeping Do-Gooder

Such was Ramakrishna's ontological, essentially Tantric vision of the world. But what about his specific responses to social action? Consider for a moment an appendix of volume five of Gupta's *Kathāmṛta*: "Appendix Three: Sri Ramakrishna and Helping Others." For reasons that will become obvious shortly, Gupta kept this appendix until the very end (and then some), as it did not appear until the last pages of the very last, *posthumously* published volume (KA 5.200–202). No doubt for the same reasons, Nikhilananda bowdlerized one of its most striking images (discussed below) from his translation.[40] Here, in other words, we are dealing yet again with censored material, with secrets this time of the mystical as the asocial. The appendix becomes even more important when we realize that scholars such as Beckerlegge[41] and Rosselli[42] used the same text to support their own arguments, arguments that no doubt would have been even stronger had they known what the English translation was hiding just out of view.

The appendix as a whole is nested within a larger section on Ramakrishna's conversations with the nineteenth-century literary figure Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. It opens with Ramakrishna glossing for Bankim his famous phrase "lover-and-gold" (*kāminī-kāñcana*). Ramakrishna begins with *kāminī* or "lover"; after having one or two children, he tells the famous author, a man should live with his wife "like a sister" and spend all his time discussing the things of God with her. If one prays to God, the "beast-state" (*paśu-bhāva*) will depart. "And then there is gold [*kāñcana*]." Here the saint proudly recounts how he once took some money (*ṭākā*) in one hand and clay (*māṭi*) in another and chanted, "Money, clay. Money, clay. Money, clay." After realizing the essential identity of these two equally worthless substances, Ramakrishna threw them both in the water in an act of renunciation. Bankim is quick to see the implications of Ramakrishna's story and immediately questions its social usefulness: "Money is clay! Sir, if one has some change, it can be given to the poor. If money is clay, would this not make the compassionate act of helping others impossible?" Ramakrishna's responds with an image:

> Compassion! Helping others! Is helping others something for you to accomplish? A man is so proud, but when he goes to sleep, if someone stands over him and pees [*mute deya*] in his mouth, will it not fill up

> the mouth and pour out? Then where is his ego, his pride, his vanity? (KA 5.201)

Certainly no answer to Bankim's socioeconomic sensitivity, the response is little more than an angry *ad hominem* attack. But even this is not enough for Ramakrishna, for he has the man sleeping—ignorantly, pathetically—through it all in an attempt to demonstrate the utter vanity and pride, the sheer unconsciousness that supposedly lies behind any notion of helping another human being. Such were Ramakrishna's feelings about those who think they can "do good."

If the reader hopes for some sort of qualification to or retreat from such a hard position, he or she is quickly disappointed. Ramakrishna takes up the remainder of the appendix preaching to poor Bankim about the folly of his ignorantly sleepy position. Compassion belongs to God alone, Ramakrishna tells Bankim, and everything that happens happens because of the "will of Rāma"; it is thus pointless to try to change anything. Money, of course, is necessary for the worldly householder, for he has a wife and kids to support, but even he must work without desire (*niṣkāma karma*) and without attachment (*anāsakta*) and never delude himself into imagining that he can truly help another human being. Indeed, when such a man gives something to another, he is really helping not the other, but his own true self, for God dwells in all creatures, and so to serve them is to serve God. Technically speaking, then, there can be no such thing as "helping others" (*paropakāra*) or working for "the welfare of others" (*parer maṅgala*) because, metaphysically speaking, *there is no other*. (Quite a reversal of the *tat tvam asi* ethic!) Certainly, the modern democratic notion of a "person" who innately possesses dignity, certain human rights, and inherent value would have been foreign to the saint. Ultimately, there is no other, no human person worth tending to. Hence he teaches that one takes up the "discipline of action" (*karma-yoga*), not to help another human being, but to help oneself (*nijer upakāra*), to seek one's own welfare (*nijer maṅgala*), and to attain God (who, of course, dwells within the self, or even *is* the Self). In the end, action, good intention, and helping others are not the point of life. God is (KA 5.201–2).[43]

To drive the point home (as if it needed to be), Ramakrishna then tells Bankim about Shambhu, a disciple who had once confessed to Ramakrishna that he wanted to build dispensaries and hospitals in order to help as many people as he could. Ramakrishna told him that this was acceptable, as long as he could do it without desire (*niṣkāma*), but warned him that this would be very difficult and perhaps in the end impossible—too much action, after all, makes one forget God. Before the glory and pleasure of visionary experience, moreover, such social endeavors are more than a little silly: "I said, 'Shambhu! Let me ask you a question. If God came and appeared before you, would you want him, or would you want to build dispensaries and hospitals?'" (KA 5.202) God and social work, it seems, are incompatible choices for Ramakrishna.

Finally adding a welcome qualification to his opening image, Ramakrishna admits that those who build dispensaries and hospitals are good people (*bhāla loka*) but immediately adds that those who attain the pure devotion to God are of a "different class" (*ālādā thāka*), which for Ramakrishna means "a better class." So ends the appendix (KA 5.202).

Some historical-critical problems with this appendix should be noted. First, Gupta did not include it in the body of his text, perhaps signaling that it is based on second-hand information.[44] At least one scholar, Gopal Ray, has called into serious question the historical reliability of the event, arguing that it is in fact a fictional account.[45] I think this is quite possible, but even granted this, it still cannot explain why Gupta would have included something so provocative and troubling to the tradition in his text. In other words, the fact that the appendix might be fictional only *adds* to the problem of "Gupta's why." Perhaps he had some rather serious qualms with the historical accuracy of the contemporary portraits of Ramakrishna around 1932, when he died. It is quite probable that he included this appendix—fictional or no—in the last of his volumes because he knew that it contradicted virtually everything that Vivekananda represented. And indeed it does. Did not Vivekananda teach that *karma-yoga* was the most fit discipline for the present age, so in need of reform and change? Did he not encourage his disciples to abandon their pious, solipsistic, and effeminate religious practices to serve God in the world, in the poor, and in the marginalized? Did he not make the "helping of others" and the "service of God in the destitute" (*daridranārāyaṇa seva*) one of the pillars of his socioreligious project? Indeed, he did all of these things. But the Ramakrishna of this appendix certainly never did. He thus had to be kept for a posthumous appearance.[46] Gupta was now safely dead, so he could not be criticized or attacked for pointing out "the other Ramakrishna."

Another way of approaching the question of the appendix's historical status is to ask whether it represents an isolated instance. Does it, for example, misrepresent the saint's teachings as they appear in other volumes of the *Kathāmṛta*? The answer to this question is a clear and resounding "No." Indeed, Ramakrishna's discussion with Bankim, whether historically accurate or not, fits in seamlessly with the saint's other recorded teachings on free will and responsibility, as we have seen above, and on action (*karma*), social work, and the human nonagent (*akartā*), to which I now turn.

Karma and Guṇa-Theory: The Doctrinal Context of Ramakrishna's Teachings

Ramakrishna's bitter feelings about the do-gooder is no doubt at least partially tied up with the colonial context in which he felt and thought, for Ramakrishna and many of his disciples saw clearly that the social reform projects of their era stemmed ultimately from the Christian West and its radically different world-

view. To pee in the do-gooder's mouth, then, was in some sense to pee on the West and the Christian, and to call the do-gooder vain and proud was to call the missionary and the colonial reformer names—and this, no doubt, felt good. But we would be mistaken if we tried to explain Ramakrishna's rejection of Western social consciousness and its reforming, critical spirit as simply a product of his anticolonialism and politics. Contrary to what is often suggested, everything in nineteenth-century Bengal cannot be explained in political or colonial categories. There were also clear, unmistakable and probably more important *religious* reasons that Ramakrishna rejected the do-gooder, and there was an impressive doctrinal foundation, rooted deeply in traditional, precolonial Hindu speculative systems, that supported, held up, and even demanded his criticisms. To understand his sometimes extreme reactions to the do-gooder, then, we must first take into consideration these traditional categories and understand how radically different they are from Western ethical conceptualizations of the individual, human action, and work. The problem, in other words, is not simply a colonial one. If I may be pardoned by the historians, it is much deeper than this: it is *structural* and *philosophical*.

Foremost among these traditional Indian structures or philosophical categories was the concept of *karma*. Ramakrishna used the term in various ways. It could mean simply "ritual action" (KA 1.138; 1.185; 4.69). Less often, it could could refer to past lives and the moral momentum their actions set up in the soul. More commonly, however, it meant simply "action," and more specifically, a kind of human action that psychologically binds one to the illusory and the unreal. To explain these psychological and ontological characteristics of action, Ramakrishna often employed traditional *guṇa*-theory and its tripartite division of persons and things into the qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas,* or "beingness," "fiery passion," and "dark inertia." *Sattva* is associated with proximity to God, and *rajas* is associated with the intentions and desires of human action: "If pure *sattva* comes to someone, he only wants to think of God, nothing else attracts him. . . . When the *sattva guṇa* is mixed with *rajas* the mind goes gradually in different directions until all sorts of presumptions arise, like 'I will help the world'" (KA 1.244). Although the unqualified *brahman* exists "beyond the three *guṇa*s," the point of the religious life is to eliminate from one's soul both the dark, dumb, depressing characteristics of *tamas* and the fiery, passionate qualities of *rajas* in order to come closer and closer to the calm, contemplative nature of *sattva*. *Sattva,* if you will, is the last step of the stairs before one reaches the roof of God (KA 1.157). It is *not* God, but it is close. In another metaphor, Ramakrishna liked to talk about the "three robbers" of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Tamas* wants to kill you, *rajas* wants to bind you, and *sattva* wants to let you go (e.g., KA 1.89). They are all robbers, thieves who are not yet God, but some are more criminal than others.

Because *karma* as action is a function of *rajas,* it stands somewhere in the middle of things: it is not necessarily a mark of spiritual darkness (*tamas*)—

although it is sometimes associated with a lack of faith (KA 1.158)—but neither is it something that you want to get stuck in. Like the second robber, it wants to keep you bound. Thus, drawing on the *Gītā*, Ramakrishna taught that action is inevitable and cannot be avoided (KA 3.20), but in the end it is something to transcend, to end, to dissolve in mystical union (*samādhi*) or in God (1.138). The only reason to act, in other words, is to reach a point where one can *not* act.

Ramakrishna recognizes the three traditional *mārga*s or "paths" to God: *jñāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, and *bhakti-yoga*. Whereas Vivekananda will prefer the first two and speak glowingly especially of the second "path of action," Ramakrishna takes the exact opposite position, downplaying both *jñāna-* and *karma-yoga* as too "dry" and "difficult" and clearly prefering the third "path of devotion" as the best. God can be attained through *karma*, he taught, but only if one can engage in it "without desire" (*niṣkāma*) and come to the realization that only God possesses agency, that only God truly acts. The human being is a nonagent (*akartā*), a mere instrument in the hands of the controller, a train car (*gāṛī*) controlled by the divine engineer (KA 4.59). This, however, is very difficult for human beings to accept and realize, so deluded are they by their actions. Whenever Ramakrishna must acknowledge this path of action, then, he insists on immediately qualifying it with two words: *baṛa kaṭhina*, "very difficult." The phrase is omnipresent.[47]

Bhakti-yoga is much better. Its love is delightful, and, most importantly, it inevitably eliminates the hankering desire for action and doing: "the more devotion and love for him comes, the more your *karma* will lessen" (KA 3.15; cf. 1.141–42). Ramakrishna compares the devotee who knows such a love to the pregnant woman who does less and less housework as her pregnancy develops until she ultimately abandons all of it to nurse and love the newborn baby (KA 3.15). In another metaphor, this delightful *bhakti* is likened to the tasty "fruit" that is the ultimate end of the "flower" of *karma*—when the flower of *karma* drops off or disappears, the fruit of devotional love has arrived (KA 1.138; 1.185; 1.221). Love is thus the end (in both senses of that term) of action. Hence Ramakrishna can say that giving *jñāna* may be better than giving food, but giving *bhakti* is better still. Once again Ramakrishna relativizes "doing good" (in this case, feeding the hungry) to the lowest of planes and invokes the fruit: "You came here to eat mangos. So eat mangos" (KA 4.58). The goal, then, is pleasure and delight, not purpose and project. Such a delightful existence is further undergirded by Ramakrishna's insistence that there is no such thing as a human "actor" (*kartā*).[48]

All of these strikingly persistent denials issue out of the saint's theomonistic ontology, in which only God truly exists: unlike Shambhu, who is bent on building hospitals, the man of pure *bhakti* has realized that "God is real and everything else is unreal" (KA 5.202). In other terms, we might say that, just as Ramakrishna taught that *tinii sava hoecchen*, that "he/she himself/herself has become everything,"[49] so too did he insist that *tini sava kocchen,* that "he/she does everything" (KA 4.59). His understanding of action in all its psychological, ethical, and social

dimensions, in other words, developed directly out of his ontology. For if the human person does not ultimately exist, how can there be an agent who possesses free will? Only God ultimately exists, and so only God has free will; only he can act. Human action, human agency, and individual responsibility are all dissolved with the human person in such an ontological vision and its psychological correlate, the experience of a formless, blissful *samādhi*. The mystical here has completely drowned the social.

Ramakrishna's teachings on action, then, function in ways very similar to the humorous Karmanāśī River ("the river that destroys *karma*") that he liked to tell his disciples about. This river is very dangerous, he told them (with a smile, no doubt), since as soon as one jumps in all one's *karma* is dissolved and it becomes impossible to act again (KA 1.221). The saint was clearly aware of such dangers and so did not encourage those still involved in the social world to enter fully the mystical life, hence his warning to Keshab Sen *not* to preach about jumping into the Ocean of Saccidānanda, lest his male disciples abandon their women and their family duties; it is fine to take an occasional dip, but Keshab should preach a regular return back to the "dry land" of the women and the world (KA 2.114).[50] In the watery depths of the Godhead, it seems, there is little, if any, chance that one could find enough stable ground upon which to construct a socially active religious vision.

Shambhu's Dispensaries and Hospitals

Not that some of his disciples did not try. Indeed, there were many, and all of them were roundly criticized by the saint. Perhaps Ramakrishna's favorite "straw man" was poor Shambhu Mallik, whom we saw in Appendix Three. Ramakrishna mentions him often in the pages of the *Kathāmṛta,*[51] always to criticize his silly notions about wanting to build "dispensaries and hospitals." Did he not ask Shambhu what he would choose if God appeared before him? Would *anyone* want to build dispensaries and hospitals then? Of course not.

But Shambhu was by no means the only object of Ramakrishna's criticisms. Other targets were Krishnadas Pal, Mahimacharan, and pandit Vidyasagar. When Ramakrishna asked Krishnadas what the purpose of life is (no doubt to test him), Krishnadas answered "to help the world and to relieve its suffering." This was not the right answer. It was the Westernized answer. And so Ramakrishna became visibly angry and sharply replied, "Why are you such an idiot?[52] Can you relieve the sufferings of the world? Is the world such a small thing?" (KA 5.168). When Krishnadas was not present, Ramakrishna would relate the same scene to his disciples and describe how Krishnadas was of the *rajas guṇa* and had "nothing inside him." Just as bad, although a Hindu, he wore boots (KA 2.157), more proof that the man had sold out to the Christians.

Like the booted Krishnadas, Mahimacharan wanted to help others, and so he founded a new school. Ramakrishna is not impressed and tells Mahimacharan

about Shambhu. Such projects are good, he admits, but it is "very difficult" to use them to reach God. Mahimacharan responds by asking to what means, then, a man such as himself in the world should resort. Ramakrishna responds with the answer: he should keep company with holy men and listen to spiritual talk (KA 3.174–75). In another scene with Mahimacharan, Ramakrishna admits that feeding people is one way of serving God, since God exists in them "like a fire" and feeding this fire is a kind of sacrifice. "But," he quickly adds in a troubling, if honest, qualifier, "one shouldn't feed wicked people [*asat loka*]." The very ground these souls sit and eat on is impure for seven cubits down (KA 1.124). The spirit of such scenes could not be any further from that of the admirable work of the present-day Ramakrishna Mission, which runs schools and hospitals and routinely feeds the poor, thankfully regardless of their alleged moral status.

But certainly it was Vidyasagar, the famous pandit and social reformer who wanted "earth to become a heaven" (KA 3.6), who was the most famous of Ramakrishna's debating "do-gooders." Ramakrishna goes quite easy on him when they meet face to face, describing his compassion as a form of *sattver rajas*, that is, as "the *rajas* of *sattva*," a kind of halfway point between the fires of action and the peace of lucid contemplation (KA 3.5). When Vidyasagar is not present, however, he is considerably more critical: "Then there's pandit Vidyasagar. He has compassion but no inner vision. Gold is hidden inside him. If he would have looked for the gold, his outer actions would have lessened and he would have finally renounced them completely" (KA 1.89). Vidyasagar, in other words, is "golden" for Ramakrishna only to the extent that he renounces the very things he himself would identify with and achieves that actionless state of renunciation with which Ramakrishna identifies.

For Ramakrishna, in the end there is only one way to truly help the world, and it has very little to do with Vidyasagar's social and scholarly projects or with Western notions of social involvement. Once again, it involves mangos. There are two sorts of mango-eaters, Ramakrishna taught. There are the knowers, who enjoy the mango-juice of *brahman* and then keep it to themselves. They do not come back to share the sweetness. Indeed, they wipe the juice off their faces so that no one even knows that they have mangos. But there is also the loving Paramahaṁsa, who enjoys the juice and then comes back to teach others about it. He shares his mangos and so delivers his fellow human beings from the suffering and illusions of a world exiled from the garden (KA 3.108). Ramakrishna saw himself as this type of teacher. He teaches in order to share the sweet fruit of God (KA 4.116). He saw Shambhu, Krishnadas, Mahimacharan, and Vidyasagar in a very different light—all of them were too busy in the world of *karma* to enjoy the sweetness of *bhakti* and the gold of *jñāna* that existed somewhere "in" them. If Ramakrishna had a mystical ethics, then, it was aimed directly at the transformation of subjective, psychological, and spiritual states, certainly not at social change and the messy intricacies of public institutions.

On Social Action as Christian Action

So far we have encountered Bengali expressions such as *jagater upakāra* or "helping the world" and *paropakāra* or "helping others." We have looked, moreover, at *karma* as "action" in general and have seen how Ramakrishna sought to push his listeners beyond its binding, deluding attractions. Throughout our discussion we have remained, for the most part, well within the Indian religious world. But all of these teachings, however Indian they may have been, were advanced, remembered, and published within a politicohistorical context that ultimately went far beyond the parameters of the traditional Hindu world. In other words, something else is "behind" or, perhaps better, "in front of" these teachings, something that is not always clearly seen but that was nevertheless very important both to Ramakrishna, who allegedly first spoke these teachings, and to M, who most certainly published them.

Consider, for example, the seemingly innocent expression *jagater upakāra* or "helping the world." The phrase seems Bengali enough. But consider for a moment how M translates it into English within one of his many section headings: "the European ideal of work" (KA 3.15). Now something else appears and we begin to get a better sense of what was really at stake in Ramakrishna's trenchant criticisms of the do-gooders, of the hospital and school builders, and of the reformers. The Western work ethic was a common target of Ramakrishna's barbs. This should not surprise us; Ramakrishna, after all, was a man who routinely preached about the virtues of sacred "leisure" (*avasara*) (KA 2.200; 3.60; 3.147; 3.230; 4.215; 5.11; 5.124; 5.178; 5.212) and saw the "job" and "work" in general as spiritual dangerous activities.[53] But again, something else is here, something that goes well beyond the purely religious, something ultimately *political*.

This political dimension of Ramakrishna's criticisms becomes particularly transparent in a fascinating section in volume one entitled "The Worship of Gold in England—Is the Meaning of Life Work or the Attainment of God?" (KA 1.126–29) Here, in a discussion with a man who has lived in England, Ramakrishna criticizes the English for their rajasic temperaments and their unspiritual tendencies to adopt a *karma-yoga*. Such a path is eminently "Western" (or at least "English") for the saint. And of course, it is also "very difficult" (*baṛa kaṭhina*). The criticisms by no means end there this time, though. Ramakrishna goes on to explain how "the pomp of work arises in the *rajas guṇa,*" and that this *rajas* can easily degenerate into a spiritually deadening *tamas*: "*tamas* comes from *rajas*," we are told. The *rajas* and *karma-yoga* of England and its gold, in other words, are the wrong ways. *Bhakti-yoga* is much better. One should pray, "O God, lessen my action" (KA 1.127). The purpose of life, once again, is not to work or even to act. It is to attain God.

Similar themes come out "from behind" even more clearly in a passage that records Ramakrishna criticizing Keshab Sen and his reforming spirit: "Keshab

was of the Christian *dharma* before; he thought many thoughts like the Christians" (KA 5.105). Here the saint explicitly locates the ultimate meaning of Keshab's social concerns in a Christian worldview. Gupta's answer to the complaining saint develops such an identification between reform and Christianity:

> If Keshab would have come here [to Ramakrishna] first, he would not have become so eager for improving society [*samāja saṁskāra*]. He would not have become so eager for social action [*sāmājika karma*] and projects like lifting caste restrictions, marrying widows, intermarrying the castes, and educating women. (KA 5.105–6)

Here "action" has become "social action" (*sāmājika karma*), which by definition is "Christian" action. To "come here," in contrast, is to cease being so concerned (like the Christians) about the plight of the low castes, the widows, and women.

On Paradox, Structure, and History

Where, then, does this leave us? It leaves us with a traditional Hindu mystic who had visions of a monistic world in which the human person was merely a brief moment in the mystical emptiness of a divine game (*khelā*) or play (*līlā*); who rejected outright the philosophical principles of agency, free will, ultimate moral responsibility, and individualism; who saw ethical norms as socially and even spiritually necessary but as ontologically groundless; who argued with and made fun of the social reformer and the do-gooder as misguided and unenlightened; who privileged the categories of purity over the demands of compassion ("one shouldn't feed wicked people"); who quoted traditional and eminently representative phrases ("beyond good and evil") as well as more vernacular and local traditions (such as Bengali vernacular songs to the goddess) to support his position; and whose disciples could further invoke classical texts (the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*) to gloss the transsocial nature of his teachings. Obviously, Ramakrishna was not the source of Vivekananda's social consciousness and its consequent sociomystical ethical command to love the other as the Self. Such a conclusion does not prove Hacker's specific historical thesis about the Deussen-inspired, Kiel-located nature of Vivekananda's *tat tvam asi* ethic, but it certainly does nothing to question it, and it adds more weight to what is already a broad historical consensus about the nontraditional, essentially creative and original nature of Vivekananda's social vision.

Confessionally speaking—and it is now time to confess—I have three points to make about the ethical status of Ramakrishna's mysticism and Vivekananda's particular appropriation of it: one paradoxical, one structural, and one historical.[54]

1. Paradoxically speaking, I believe that Ramakrishna was essentially correct about the action-drowning waters of mystical love and ecstatic experience; I think that he saw very clearly the empty mystical truths "on the inside" of the goddess and understood, just as clearly, that they were incompatible with much of human life "on the outside." Philosophically speaking, he saw that his own theomonistic mystical ontology and the Western-inspired social ethics "in the air" at the time did not *and could not* go together. It is to the great mystic's credit that he saw this and said this so clearly, so consistently, and so provocatively, and it seems to me that he was a great mystic *precisely* to the extent that he was not a social reformer. None of this, I must stress, calls into question Ramakrishna's status as a saint and mystic of the highest caliber; indeed, I can affirm with Rosselli that "the present inquiry flows from an assumption that Ramakrishna was a genuine mystic and whatever we understand by the term, a most remarkable saint, comparable in Western mysticism to Saint John of the Cross."[55] But this, as I hope I have made clear in the present volume, says very little about the ethical and social status of Ramakrishna's mysticism. No doubt, his striking vision of the child on the outside and the inside of the goddess attempts to join these two disjointed mystical and social existences in a narrative-image, but even it must fail, for in the end we are left with a truth that is truly troubling, namely, that we do not ultimately exist as socially constructed egos, *as us*, on the inside of the goddess. She eats us. We are ecstatically empty moments in the divinely feminine flux of time and space.

And this is profound. But it is also socially and ethically dysfunctional, for such ontological truths are not very helpful—indeed, they are positively destructive—when one wants to help real, suffering human beings with equally real constructed selves, modernize a traditional society, build "hospitals and dispensaries," and construct a modern nation-state with all the industry, wealth, and political systems that such a task requires. And this, among many other things, is *exactly* what Vivekananda wanted to do. He thus had to turn to ideas and social philosophies that had only tenuous connections with traditional Indian thought; he had to introduce the individual into an ontic world and social system where it traditionally did not belong; and, perhaps most important for our purposes, he had to develop a mystical ethic that could accomplish two contradictory goals: (1) sacralize the modern individual *qua* individual;[56] and (2) legitimate this new individualism by linking it to the ancient scriptural texts, where it never in fact clearly existed. There may have been other ways to accomplish this, but I seriously doubt if they would have been any less untraditional and any less "Western." It is to Vivekananda's credit that he did not shrink from his eminently creative, essentially "heretical" task. As Adams and Beckerlegge have both pointed out, had he opted for the more traditional direction of founding an ashram of renouncers, he would have condemned the movement to certain historical anonymity.[57] As it turns out, Vivekananda refused this traditional path and chose instead one that would make of his movement something perhaps unique in the

history of Indian religion: a *paradoxical monasticism* that holds within its institutional and doctrinal structures the inevitable and essentially creative tensions of a truly moral mysticism. And this is a cause for wonder and admiration.

2. Structurally speaking, I believe that we can take Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as paradigmatic representatives of two very different types of Hinduism, the one traditional, caste-based, and essentially mystical, the other modern, individualist, and essentially social. Certainly there are multiple connections between them and influences from the former to the latter—I am certainly not denying these—but the two worldviews cannot be equated, and their real structural differences must be acknowledged as genuine and important. At the very least we are left with a deep ambiguity and a profound ambivalence, or, in Beckerlegge's apt terms, with a "tension" seeking, if never quite attaining, resolution.

This, however, is not to say that Hindu monistic thought *cannot* develop an ethics identical or similar to Vivekananda's *tat tvam asi* ethic (Buddhism certainly did with its connection of the ontology of emptiness and the ethical injunction of compassion), only that, historically speaking, it *did not* develop such an ethics until its contact with Western social philosophy, and that, once it did, it had to struggle intellectually (and no doubt emotionally) with the consequences of its own structural instability, hence a twentieth-century debate arose about the ethical status of Indic mystical traditions.

But this, of course, raises the issues of authenticity and representation. Who here is "really Hindu"? Śaṅkara? Or Ramakrishna? Or Vivekananda? Or Schopenhauer? Here is where I would part company with Hacker, who clearly believed that Indians are mistaken when they take the *tat tvam asi* ethic "to be actually Hindu." This, it seems to me, is to go too far and to condemn too easily. After all, to deny Hindus the right to appropriate a Western philosophical doctrine into their own indigenous philosophical system is to operate with an ahistorical privileging of the ancient as the "original" and the "true"; moreover, and just as problematically, it is to read cultural encounter, such as took place during the colonial period (and which has only accelerated in the postcolonial period), as an inappropriate "mixing" of racially and/or religiously pure substances. Both of these assumptions, it seems to me, are indefensible. After all, if the history of religions has taught us anything, it is that there never was and never will be any "pure" religion; *all* religious traditions (including and especially Christianity, that unstable union of Hebrew and Greco-Roman thought) are cultural hybrids, amalgamations of ideological, ritual, mythological, and artistic bits and pieces strewn throughout space and time, constantly interacting, rearranging, interpenetrating, rejecting, fighting, and uniting in agonistic political, social, and psychological contexts. Colonial (and now postcolonial) India, in other words, is not the exception but the norm. Given this, I see no reason why Vivekananda's adoption of Deussen's Schopenhaurian doctrine must be seen as "inauthentic," as somehow not really Hindu. Did Hindu reformers not have at their disposal

any number of Indic and Western doctrines to choose from? Why, then, did Vivekananda choose this one and not some other? Clearly, the idea's consensual acceptance within the tradition speaks to some basic analogy or similarity or, following Gupta, "elective affinity" between the two philosophical traditions. It is only when thinkers, Hindu or otherwise, want to insist that such an ethics is "ancient" and not a creative creation of colonial encounter that, as historians of religions, we must disagree. Andrew Fort has made two very similar points with respect to Vivekananda's and Radhakrishnan's neo-Vedāntic notions of a socially concerned *jīvanmukti* or "liberation in life," and they are worth repeating here:

> all traditions change, and adding social service to the classical model of *jīvanmukti* is legitimate (and one might even say good), yet it is still important to note that this idea is a reinterpretation—even a distortion—of the views of Śaṅkara and his followers. . . . While it *is* traditional to claim unity and continuity in Advaitic thought, those of us in the Western academic tradition cannot so easily ingore changes from earlier ideas, particularly when unrecognized or unstated.[58]

I could not agree more. Historical probability, especially when it is as strong as it is here, is not so negotiable. As Schweitzer rightly pointed out—"Even historical truth is truth."[59] Like the Buddha, we must insist that the only permanent thing about the history of religions is change, and that this historical lesson is simply one more demonstration of that most basic truth.

3. This brings me to my third point about the radical historicity of contemporary Hindu mysticism. As noted above, the structural differences that can be detected in the thought of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were historically generated in the culturally, politically, and religiously contested spaces of colonial history. This, however, is not to say that everything of difference in Vivekananda and Ramakrishna can be reduced to colonial politics or Christian influence. Quite the contrary. Indeed, with respect to the alleged "Christian" origins of the modernity Vivekananda embodied, it seems just as likely that it was the secular, socioeconomic, and technological transformations of the nineteenth century that gave the West (and now South Asia) their modern sense of the individual as a person worthy of respect and dignity and basic human rights. Moreover, even if we cannot credit such things to secularism in the past, we certainly can do so today with respect to any number of important socioethical movements.[60]

A version of this last point, with reference to the Ramakrishna and Vivekananda materials, has been most convincingly advanced by Gwilym Beckerlegge, who has argued in an important essay (1) that earlier Christian philanthropy bears a striking resemblance to traditional Hindu philanthropy (with

both forms directed to the philanthropist's own religious community, motivated by hopes for reward, and lacking a true "social welfare" philosophy); (2) that "the development of Western philanthropy into social service was not simply an extension of earlier, established Christian charitable action;"[61] and (3) that this new scientific philanthropy flowed out of a whole complex of nineteenth-century social developments, many of them quite "extraneous to Christian conviction"[62] and normally subsumed under the category of modernization: the industrial revolution, secularization, education, urbanization, the development of mass transport, medical advances, a wider (largely humanist or secular) recognition of human rights, increasingly democratic forms of government, the rise of the organized nation-state, and so on. Although Beckerlegge is careful not to discount the possible (if unclear and remote) Christian origins of modern Western social philanthropy—and I think this is wise—his essay clearly tends toward a positive reply to the first option of his own unanswered rhetorical question: "Is it more appopriate, therefore, to consider Vivekananda's promotion of organised service as a response from one caught up in a modernisation process rather than a response from one primarily determined to 'Westernise' Hindu culture, or from one who had recognised that a deficiency in Hindu philanthropic activity could only be made good through the absorption of a Christian-derived social ethic?"[63]

For my own part, I would prefer to keep all three processes in tension—modernization, Westernization, and Christianization—but put the emphasis, with Beckerlegge, on modernization. I would thus argue that the twentieth-century debate about the moral status of Hindu mysticism was not just a struggle between the West and the East—although it was that—or even simply a religious battle between Christianity and a developing Hinduism—although it was clearly that as well—but that it was also, and perhaps primarily, an agonistic encounter between two different forms of historical consciousness: the premodern and the modern, as I outlined in my opening essay.

To put some textual meat on this abstract, skeletal question of whether it was a modernization, Westernization, or Christianization process (or all three) that acted as a catalyst behind Vivekananda's social vision, consider for a moment the opening chapter of Saradananda's *Līlāprasaṅga*, the canonical version of Ramakrishna's life. In the very first chapter of this text, entitled "The Need of the Age," Saradananda explains the reason for Ramakrishna's incarnation or "descent" (*avatāra*) into nineteenth-century India. In doing so, he displays a stunningly clear and articulate understanding of the forces discussed here.

For example, the Swami characterizes Western civilization as a "materialistic philosophy of life" that has produced "a social system based on wealth," "death-dealing weapons," gross social and economic inequalities, and the occupation and oppression of other countries (LP 1.1.5). Here economic prosperity, capitalism, and colonialism are all linked—and roundly condemned. Secularism and materialism get it next. Western culture, we are told, is "founded on self-love, the

desire for worldly possessions and an absence of faith in religion" (LP 1.1.6). Indian culture, in contrast, is unique in that it is founded on religion (LP 1.1.8). With this materialistic West/spiritual East dichotomy in mind (which Vivekananda had more or less perfected before him), Saradananda then goes on to describe the havoc Western ideas have wrought in India:

> Acknowledging the existence of an afterlife and of the immortal Self were [considered to be] poetic fictions. And what custom could be more unjust and irrational than that a man should remain bound for life in the social class into which he was born? . . . The worship of the innumerable gods and goddesses was discouraged for a long time as idolatry. The Christian religion and a monotheistic doctrine modelled after it began to be preached. Social organizations modelled after the West were organized, and a lifeless Bharata [India] was made to listen to various talks about political science, sociology, the marriage of widows, and the establishment of women's rights—but Bharata's sense of meaninglessness and her cries did not let up but began to grow stronger each day. The railroad, the telegraph system, and other accruements of Western society were set up in Bharata one by one, but such efforts were futile, for all these attempts to search out and stimulate again the inspiration that gave Bharata life came to nothing. (LP 1.1.9–10)

It was to destroy this sense of "meaninglessness" (*abhāvabodha*, literally "a feeling of nonexistence") and secular despair, both in India and in the world, that Ramakrishna descended: "He could not fail to understand that in this age, the Mother had once more taken to the battlefield for killing the indominable . . . demon of delusion produced by ignorance" (LP 5.PREF.3). Ramakrishna's advent thus takes on mythological proportions. As the goddess, he has come to slay ignorance, hatred and especially secularism (*dharmaglāni*, lit. "the destruction of religion"), qualities which for Saradananda are all eminently Western. Accordingly, Saradananda notes with satisfaction that, as if by some divine design, Ramakrishna was born the very same year that Western education was introduced into India (LP 5.PREF.3). The goddess acts quickly to slay the Western demon.

Who is now explicitly identified with Western thought itself. Tellingly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate in this demonic body of knowledge the categories of modernity, Westernization, and Christianity. Christian monotheism, English education, Western social theory, human rights, and technology (everything from married widows to telegraph wires) merge imperceptibly into one another. Just as tellingly, however, it would be impossible to imagine a modernity without the rights of women and the consciousness-altering impact of modern technology,

although it would be quite easy to imagine a Christianity without either. Once again, then, it seems reasonable to put our emphasis on modernization as the primary force behind Vivekananda's and India's colonial struggle with the West.[64]

Ironically and paradoxically, Vivekananda, perhaps more than any other religious thinker of modern India, did more to hasten, encourage, and even sacralize the same modernization process (telegraphs and all) that, we are told, Ramakrishna descended to destroy. Saradananda's theological vision of Ramakrishna as the goddess who had come to slay the demon of Western modernity was thus turned back and ultimately defeated by his own most famous disciple. It would be difficult indeed, then, to see any conflict between Ramakrishna's mysticism and Vivekananda's acute social vision as a simple version of "us" versus "them," or the West versus the East, or even Christianity versus Hinduism. We are back, in other words, to the now familiar ontological-ethical paradox of wanting to live dualistically "on the outside" of a monistic goddess-world that ultimately must and will eat us.

If the reader needs any more evidence for the tense, essentially paradoxical relationship between the mystical and the socioethical, it is perhaps appropriate to note here, at the end of the essay, that toward the end of his life Vivekananda saw the same and came to a quite traditional resolution of the problem, a resolution of which his Master would have been quite proud: Vivekananda effectively abandoned society and politics for mystical absorption in the goddess (very similar patterns, by the way, had been previously displayed by another great Bengali reformer, Keshab Chandra Sen, and were later repeated in the life of another great Bengali mystic, Sri Aurobindo, but those are other stories for other times). The transition began in Kashmir in 1897, just five years before the Swami died. It was August. His devotion had shifted away from the masculine Śiva to the goddess as Mother, and he became obsessed with what he called "the worship of the Terrible" in the form of Kālī.[65] It was then that he wrote his famous poem "Kālī the Mother," after which he disappeared until 6 October. When he emerged from his self-imposed retreat, Vivekananda was a changed man. Three years later, he wrote the following reflections:

> This is the world, hideous, beastly corpse. Who thinks of helping it is a fool. . . . I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna . . . that is my true nature; works and activities, doing good and so forth are only superimpostitions. Now I again hear his voice, the same old voice thrilling my soul. . . . I have long given up my place as leader. . . . Behind my work was ambition . . . behind my guidance the thirst for power. Now they are vanishing and I drift. I come! Mother, I come! . . . I come, a spectator, no more an actor. Oh, it is so calm![66]

In the terms of the present essay, we might say that the goddess had finally eaten Vivekananda, and with him, all his desire to engage in social or political activity.

To sum up all of these historical, textual, and ethical reflections, I would suggest that in studying Vivekananda's *tat tvam asi* ethic "on the outside" of this goddess and his clear departure from "the inside" of Ramakrishna's transmoral mysticism, we do far more than study two more historical figures and their respective ideas. We stand at a crossroads and witness a people's decision to turn down a particular path, one that has taken them into a present, into a modernity (and now postmodernity) *that we presently all share together*, Christian and Hindu and secularist alike. It is now up to us, together, to acknowledge with Ramakrishna the "empty" nature of reality within the goddess-world's inner belly, even as we struggle, again together, with Vivekananda to assert the integrity and value of the human individual, trying all along not to be prematurely eaten by the mystical truths that ultimately must deny to this same individuality any lasting permanence. We *are* empty, but this "we"—and all these individual "I"s—matter, and matter a great deal, at least to us. Such is our paradoxical place in this world, both inside and outside the goddess.

Notes

1. Thus when Radhakrishnan wants to prove that Indian mysticism contains "an ethic of active service," he invokes Paul Deussen's Bombay lecture, discussed below (*Eastern Religions and Western Thought* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940], 102). In a similar fashion Stace quotes Schopenhauer to support his own moral perennialism and its conviction that feelings of sympathy and moral compassion have their ontological source in the mystical experience of the "One or Universal Self" (W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* [London: Macmillan, 1960], 325). Although Katz mentions neither Deussen nor Schopenhauer, his reading of the *brahman/ātman* equation as the "deeper metaphysical ground where the two categories [of liberation and ethics] merge" is identical to this same *tat tvam asi* ethic: "Once grasped," he writes, "the aphorism 'to love your neighbour as yourself' takes on a new, Hindu meaning" ("Ethics and Mysticism in Eastern Mystical Traditions," *Religious Studies* 28: 258). We are back to the very words of Deussen and Radhakrishnan.
2. Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Development* (New York: Henry Holt & Company), 43.
3. Halbfass tells us that Hacker borrowed the term from the Jesuit Robert Antoine, who may in turn have gotten it from the Bengali scholar Brajendranath Seal (1864–1938) (*Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta*, edited by Wilhelm Halbfass [Albany: SUNY Press, 1995], 9).
4. In Halbfass, ed., *Philology and Confrontation*; henceforth cited parenthetically in body of text. The essay originally appeared in German in 1961 as "Schopenhauer und die Ethik des Hinduismus."
5. Dermot Killingley, "Vivekanananda's Western Message from the East." In *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*, edited by William Radice (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
6. For an extended study of Vivekananda's extensive borrowings in a positive light as an example of syncretism, see Thomas L. Bryson, "The Hermeneutics of Religious Syncretism: Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedānta" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Chicago, 1990).
7. Krishna Prakash Gupta, "Religious Evolution and Social Change in India: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Movement," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 8 (1974), 33.

8. Ibid.
9. J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977; original publication, 1914), 204.
10. Ibid., 206.
11. Thus Beckerlegge can write of "the contentious appeal to Ramakrishna as a paradigm of practical concern for humanity" (Beckerlegge, "Swami Vivekananda and Seva: Taking 'Social Service' Seriously," in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda*, 190) and of "a convergence by scholars upon evidence which supports the thesis of discontinuity between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in the matter of organised service to humanity" (ibid., 173). Nevertheless, within this general consensus different historians have taken significantly different positions with respect to the degree to which Vivekananda's social teachings can be construed as "Western" or as "Christian" (and these are two different issues). For a spectrum of positions, see the essays of Adams, Beckerlegge, Farquhar, and Rosselli discussed above and below, as well as: Agehananda Bharati, *The Ochre Robe* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1980), 94–95, 119, 127; Bryson, "The Hermeneutics of Religious Syncretism"; Barbara Southard Choudhury, "Neo-Hinduism and Militant Politics in Bengal 1875–1910" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Hawaii, 1971); Paul Hacker, "Vivekananda's Religious Nationalism," in Halbfass, ed., *Philology and Confrontation*; Dermot Killingley, "Vivekanananda's Western Message from the East"; Carl T. Jackson, *Vedānta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 76–79; Freda Matchett, "The Teaching of Ramakrishna in Relation to the Hindu Tradition and as Interpreted by Vivekananda," *Religion* 11 (April 1981); Parama Roy, *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Narasingha P. Sil, *Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa: A Psychological Profile* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991); and G.M. Williams, "The Ramakrishna Movement: A Study in Religious Change," in *Religion in Modern India*, edited by Robert D. Baird (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995).
12. Norman Adams,"Background of Some Hindu Influences in America—The Ramakrishna Movement." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (Spring 1972), 322.
13. Ibid., 335.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 338.
16. See my discussion of Danto in chapter 1.
17. Adams, "Background of Some Hindu Influences," 338.
18. John Rosselli, "Sri Ramakrishna and the Educated Elite of Late Nineteenth-Century Bengal." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 12, no. 2 (1978), 196.
19. Ibid., 205. This is one of the few places where I must differ with Rosselli, as I think Ramakrishna's Śākta Tantra and its affirmation of a divinely real world significantly muted—even if it never fully transcended—the saint's discomfort and consequent rejection of the public social world (see *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], chap. 3).
20. Rosselli, "Sri Ramakrishna," 207.
21. Ibid., 207–8.
22. Ibid., 207.
23. Gwilym Beckerlegge, "Social Service as *Sadhana*: Different Perceptions of the Nature of the Continuity Between the Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda." *Religion and Society* 33, no. 4 (1986), 46.
24. Ibid., 51.
25. Ibid., 63.
26. Ibid., 66.
27. Ibid., 69. Gupta, unlike Beckerlegge, uses this notion to argue that Western social theory did not play a significant role in Vivekananda's religious vision; rather, he argues, this vision was a product of an internal, historically continuous development within the Indian tradition, along the lines of early Buddhist and Jain protests against Brahminism or the later *bhakti*-oriented reform movements that sought to establish a direct man-god

relationship (Gupta, ""Religious Evolution," 35). As for the scholarly consensus outlined above: "even though it seems grounded in history and common sense" (a fact which he notes three times: 27, 33–34, 34), it is "totally misleading" (34). Strangely, however, most of Gupta's impressive and detailed textual research works directly against this basic thesis.

28. *The Collected Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama; Mayavati Memorial Edition), vol. 7, p. 247.
29. For an extended study of these ideas, see Kripal, *Kālī's Child*, chaps. 3–4. Freda Matchett also rightly highlights the *vijñāna* theme in her fine study, "The Teaching of Ramakrishna in Relation to the Hindu Tradition and as Interpreted by Vivekananda."
30. I will be restricting myself to Gupta's *Kathāmṛta* in this study, partly because of space limitations, and partly because, with a whole host of historians, I believe it is the most historically reliable text we have. I do not mean to imply, however, that the text is beyond historical criticism. Far from it. For a helpful summary of historical-critical studies, see Narasingha P. Sil, *Ramakrishna Revisited: A New Biography* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1999), Appendix A: "Kathāmṛta on the Dock."
31. Swami Chetananda, *They Lived with God: Life Stories of Some Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna* (St. Louis: St. Louis Vedānta Society, 1989), 86–87.
32. Mahendranath Gupta (M), *Śrīśrīrāmakṛṣṇakathāmṛta,* 5 vols. (Calcutta: Kathamrita Bhaban, 1987), vol. 1, p. 249; henceforth parenthetically cited within the text as KA, followed by the volume number and page number.
33. The term Ramakrishna uses to describe Kālī's stomach, and everything that ultimately ends up in it, is *śūnya*, "empty." It is a philosophically loaded term with a very long history, especially in Buddhism. In its classical philosophical sense, the term refers not so much to a thing's nonexistence as to its absolute relativity. "Things" do not exist independently from other "things." Rather, every moment in existence is infinitely related or relative to every other moment. With the proper analysis (a religious form of reductionism), every object of our experience is found to be an aggregate, a product of other moments in space and time. Moreover, these other moments in turn are products of other moments, *ad infinitum*. Death and destruction are particularly powerful reminders of this "empty" nature of all that exists, for death, in whatever form, spells the destruction or reduction of every thing back into its constituent elements.
34. Compare the following recollection of Sharada Devi, Ramakrishna's wife: "I used to speak to the Master of such things and he would say, "I have millions of them. I shall cut my goat at the tail or through the back, and then kill it. It is my sweet will" (*The Gospel of the Holy Mother* [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984], 127).
35. Gupta quotes the *Gītā* (2.20) in a footnote to back up his Master's startling claim: "when the body is killed it [the Self] is not killed."
36. Swami Saradananda, *Śrīśrīrāmakṛṣṇalīlāprasaṅga* (Calcutta: Udbodhana Karyalaya, 1986), 5.7.19 (book 5, chap. 7, para. 19); cited parenthetically within the text as LP.
37. How much further could we be here from Radhakrishnan's moralistic reading of the Upaniṣadic dictum that "sin does not cling to a wise man any more than water clings to a lotus leaf"? Recall that he read this passage as meaning that "any one who is free from worldly attachments is also free from all temptation to sin" (*Eastern Religions*, 102–3).
38. The image of the unstained sun shining indiscriminately on everything is a traditional one in India, dating as far back as the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (5.11). It thus predates Christianity.
39. Satyacharan Mitra, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa—Jīvana O Upadeśa* (Calcutta: Great Indian Press, 1897), 118–19.
40. Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1984), 670. Ramakrishna's metaphor of peeing in the mouth of the do-gooder becomes "pours foul water into his mouth" in Nikhilananda's translation.
41. "Social Service," 62.
42. "Sri Ramakrishna and the Educated Elite," 207.
43. Hacker calls this traditional trajectory "the old Hindu-style soteriological individualism" and discusses its manifestation in the life of Vivekananda, who suffered from recurring doubts and guilt over his "thinking of the interests and the well-being of others instead of

his own ultimate salvation"; for the young Narendra, such compassion was a spiritual aberration ("Vivekananda's Religious Nationalism," in Halbfass, ed., *Philology and Confrontation*, 322).

44. Sil makes this point in his "*Kathāmṛta* on the Dock," 254.
45. See Sil's "*Kathāmṛta* on the Dock" for a discussion of Ray's argument.
46. That Gupta was aware of such interpretive anomalies is clear, since he includes another appendix "mini-study" in volume five in an attempt to synthesize—rather unconvincingly—the contradictory positions of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda (see "Appendix 8: Sri Ramakrishna, Karmayoga, Narendra, and the Service of God in the Destitute" [KA 5.177ff]).
47. See KA 1.244; 4.58; 3.174–75; 1.126–28; 5.177ff, etc.
48. See KA 1.125; 1.131; 1.160; 1.240; 1.173–1.74; 2.23; 2.39; 2.77; 2.174; 3.194; 4.3; 4.17; 4.63; 5.6; 5.87; 5.40.
49. For a discussion of this theo/a-monism, see Kripal, *Kālī's Child*, chap. 3.
50. In yet another metaphor, Ramakrishna liked to praise Keshab for his amphibious nature, referring to him as the frog that had dropped its tadpole-tail; Keshab could thus now remain either on land or in the water, that is, in the world (*saṁsāre*) or as one liberated (*mukta*) (KA 1.175). Here, I think, we encounter a teaching that has the potential to function as a genuine metaphorical resource for Vivekananda's social vision.
51. See KA 1.127–28; 2.166; 3.174–75; 3.215.
52. What the Ramakrishna of the text literally says is that Krishnadas had the "mind of a widow's child" (*raḍīputī buddhi*). The term is derogatory, and the intent is clearly to ridicule Krishnadas's intelligence (not to mention widows and their children).
53. Sumit Sarkar, "'Kaliyuga,' 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti': Ramakrishna and His Times," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 July 1992, 282–357. This is a particularly brilliant essay on, among many other topics, Vivekananda's social transformation and reversal of Ramakrishna's mystical ethics; unfortunately, it came to my attention too late for me to incorporate its many insights into the present essay.
54. Hence I follow my four-point hermeneutical model advanced in chapter 1. I will not treat here the fourth point of my position (on the psychological link between trauma and mystical states) because I have written about it at length elsewhere (in *Kālī's Child*).
55. "Sri Ramakrishna and the Educated Elite," 199.
56. I do not believe, by the way, that the *tat tvam asi* ethic completely succeeds here. Indeed, inherent in the classical phrase is a gender-transformation from a personal verb (*asi* or "you are") to a neuter *tat* or "that." The phrase, in other words, far from legitimating and sacralizing the individual *qua* individual actually ends up subsuming the individual as an engendered, embodied personality into an impersonal, neuter absolute.
57. Beckerlegge ("Social Service," 76) is citing Adams ("Background," 321).
58. *Jivanmukti in Transformation: Embodied Liberation in Advaita and Neo-Vedānta* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 173. See also Bharati, *The Robe*, 130.
59. Schweitzer, *Indian Thought*, 241.
60. The facts that feminist thought originated in primarily secular contexts, and that theologies that concern themselves with social issues, such as the liberation theologies of Central and South America, draw so heavily from the intensely social, theoretically atheistic systems of Marxism (and are, precisely because of this, generally opposed by traditional ecclesiastical authorities) lend more than a little credence to such an idea. Indeed, I think it is quite likely that, from here on out for some time, most real advances in ethical thinking and human rights issues (from environmental issues to the gay rights movement) will come not from religious minds bound to past conceptions of the person, authority, and the community, but from radical religious voices on the margins of their communities or from eminently secular or humanist minds devoted to the rights and welfare of living, historical, fully embodied human beings, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender.
61. Beckerlegge, "Swami Vivekananda and Seva: Taking 'Social Service' Seriously," in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda*, 171.

62. Ibid., 183.
63. Ibid., 184.
64. Adams makes the same point in his "Background of Some Hindu Influences," 331.
65. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1910), 162–68; cited and beautifully interpreted in Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 171.
66. Letters to Mary Hale, 17 June 1900, and Josephine MacLeod, 18 April 1900, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, 1940; Calcutta, 1970), 422–23; quoted in Sarkar, "Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti," 354–55.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Lack of Ethics and the Ethics of Lack in Buddhism

by David R. Loy

OF ALL THE major religions, Buddhism is arguably the one most interested in mysticism. Śākyamuni's *nirvāṇa*-awakening under the Bodhi tree was evidently a mystical experience (or at least had a significant mystical component), which makes mysticism the source of Buddhism. Although the same claim can be made for many religions, much of mainstream Islam is suspicious of mysticism, and most forms of Christianity do not require or permit us to duplicate Jesus' example. In contrast, all schools of Buddhism encourage us to follow in Śākya's footsteps and sooner or later attain the same awakening. Inasmuch as that experience was mystical, Buddhism urges all of us to become mystics.

This emphasis on mysticism does not imply that Buddhism deemphasizes ethics. The Pali Canon has more about morality than *nirvāṇa*, and that emphasis continues throughout the history of Buddhism. The eightfold path to liberation, set forth by the Buddha as the fourth noble truth, is often summarized into three components: *śila* morality or precepts, *samādhi* mindfulness, and *prajñā* wisdom. Five ethical precepts are commonly extracted from the eightfold path: to avoid killing, stealing, false speech, sensuality, and intoxicants. These precepts are not moral commandments imposed upon us by the Buddha or any other external agent but *undertakings* that we choose to impose upon ourselves: "I undertake the course of training to perfect myself in the precept of not-killing," and so on. The idea behind these undertakings is that when we break the precepts it is we ourselves who suffer the most. We are punished not for our sins but by them, as Spinoza might put it.[1] The distinctive contours of the Buddhist approach become apparent: morality is not a matter of satisfying some transcendental demand, rather it is a way to help us transform our own lives and, not incidentally, the world we live in.

Mahāyāna Buddhism reconceptualizes the fourth noble truth into six *pāramita*: *dāna* generosity, *śila* morality, *kśānti* patience, *vīrya* exertion, *samādhi*

meditation, and *prajñā* wisdom. *Pāramita*, usually translated as "transcendental" (transcendental generosity, etc.) or "perfection of" (perfection of generosity, etc.), refers to a character trait developed to the highest possible degree. All Buddhist traditions have acknowledged *śila* as providing the karmic foundation necessary both for lay life and for successful meditation and awakening. The *Dhammapada*, that most popular of early Buddhist texts, encapsulates the teachings in a way that emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct: "Renounce all evil, practice all good, keep the mind pure: thus all the Buddhas have taught" (verse 183).

From all this we might conclude that the connection between mysticism and ethics in Buddhism is quite straightforward. In fact, their relationship has been and remains quite problematical.

One difficulty arises from something to which the first paragraph alludes: despite the apparent importance of *mysticism* for Buddhist *awakening*, it is unclear how much they can simply be equated. Part of this problem arises from the extreme difficulty in defining either one. The difficulty with defining mysticism is something that recurs, inevitably, throughout the chapters in this book; it tends to undermine all attempts (e.g., Zaehner's) to construct typologies, which as a result usually reveal more about the bias of the interpreter than about the nature of mysticism. Within the Buddhist tradition the nature of awakening is also controversial. The earliest Pali texts understand awakening as a transformative insight that puts an end to all greed, malice, and delusion. The implication is that those who have experienced such a transformation are purified of all the *kleśa*-impurities that might motivate them to act unethically. Such a person, then, will never violate the precepts and is incapable of intentionally harming or abusing anyone. Progression on the Buddhist path is correlated with reducing such afflictive emotions which serve as the basis for immoral action. At the stage of Buddhahood all afflictive emotions are completely eliminated.[2]

Yet the Theravādin *abhidhamma* literature, which can be considered the earliest commentaries on those texts, tends to understand awakening in terms more cognitive than ethical: describing the kinds of cognition that an *ārhat* does or does not have, in what order, circumstances, and so on. Apparently an awakened *ārhat* does not experience awakened cognition of something called *nirvāṇa* at every moment; there are moments of *nirvāṇa*-cognition followed by post-awakening cognitions.

This shift in emphasis from *nirvāṇa* as *śila*-perfection to *nirvāṇa* as *prajñā*-understanding inserted a wedge between awakening and ethics, initiating a process that Mahāyāna developed. While the Theravāda tradition continued to emphasize *viśuddhi* purity, the Mahāyāna stressed compassion and wisdom, which might manifest very differently according to the situation, and which might involve behavior normally considered unethical. For instance, Chih-I (538–97 C.E.), the founder of the T'ien-t'ai school, claimed that a bodhisattva might perform immoral acts (such as becoming a prostitute, or even killing someone) if they

served the purpose of helping to save sentient beings (awakening a client, or keeping a murderer from accumulating more bad karma). A more recent example occurred in South Korea in the 1960s, when some Son (Zen) teachers said that killing communists was not really killing, but a compassionate way to prevent them from falling into hell. As this attitude became widely accepted in later Mahāyāna, a dangerous gap began to yawn between means and ends.

Two aspects of this development need to be emphasized. First, Buddhism as it developed historically and geographically transformed into such a diversity of forms that today it is probably better to speak of Buddhisms, for their various understandings of awakening are inconsistent and perhaps irreconcilable. For example, most Pali accounts of Śākyamuni's awakening, which emphasize his remembering past lives and realizing *pratītya-samutpāda* "dependent origination," seem to have little in common with Ch'an/Zen understandings that stress letting-go of oneself and realizing nonconceptual emptiness. This inconsistency is further supported by the quite different "stages of enlightenment" presented in the various schools. The four-stage Theravāda account (stream-entrant, once-returner, non-returner, *ārhat*)[3] does not seem congruent with the five degrees of Tung-shan or the ten oxherding pictures of Kuo-an, both canonical in the Ch'an/Zen tradition; to complicate matters further, my own comparative efforts have discovered little if any correspondence between the five degrees and the ten oxherding pictures!

These problems are just beginning to be addressed by Buddhist scholarship.[4] If they are approached from a mystical perspective—one that compares and analyzes mystical experiences—some pointed questions arise: are there clear-cut stages of enlightenment that are common to the different Buddhist traditions? Or are the various Buddhist hierarchical understandings of awakening experiences different constructions that utilize a plurality of mystical experiences—experiences that may or may not support such a linear, developmental understanding? My guess is that these uncomfortable issues will become central to Buddhist academia in the next decade, but they will not be easy to answer. In the context of this volume, they may be seen as part of our general problem with understanding mysticism, given the difficulty or impossibility of isolating and objectifying instances in order to study them empirically. The challenge is to maintain a tension between an uncritical acceptance of the tradition (an acceptance which tends to gullibility) and the corrosive skepticism of modern scholarship (which tends toward a different gullibility, assuming contemporary understandings of human possibility).

A second consequence of the historical split between *śila-* and *prajñā*-understandings of awakening is that the relationship between them becomes problematized in another way. No problem exists in the Pali texts: an awakened *ārhat* (according to some texts, even a stream-entrant) cannot violate the precepts, so anyone who does violate them has not awakened. The growing breach

between *śila*- and *prajñā*-conceptualizations of liberation, however, opens up the possibility that some stages of awakening, perhaps including even some of the "highest," do not automatically include moral perfection or preclude moral backsliding. And if one doubts that there is such a thing as complete awakening (if "even the Buddha is only halfway there," to quote the Zen proverb), it becomes relatively easy to rationalize immoral behavior on the part of Buddhist teachers in a way that does not challenge their *prajñā*-insight. Either the relationship between awakening and ethics is much more complicated than the tradition usually acknowledges, or such teachers are not genuinely awakened. Of course, these alternatives are not exclusive: both may be true.

Where does all this leave us? Somewhat at an impasse, for the above reflections muddy the issue of mysticism and ethics quite thoroughly. If the nature of mysticism is difficult to understand, the relationship between mysticism and Buddhist awakening becomes doubly so. And the Buddhist tradition provides us with no univocal answer to our question about the relationship between awakening and ethical conduct, except for agreement that morality is a necessary although not sufficient part of the path.

I think it is not possible to make any headway from here without adopting a more specific position about the role of mysticism in Buddhist awakening. In order to consider the ethical implications of Buddhist mysticism, we need a more focused understanding of what that mysticism is. Elsewhere[5] I have argued that one way to understand Buddhist awakening is that one *experiences the nonduality of subject and object, of self and world*. This applies more obviously to Mahāyāna understandings of awakening, especially Chan/Zen, but I also believe (although it is not possible to defend the claim here) that this nondual approach can provide a satisfactory account of the early Buddhist understanding of awakening as well as many non-Buddhist mystical experiences (especially in Advaita Vedānta and Taoism, but also Plotinus, Eckhart, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, etc.). The issue that can be addressed here is what such an understanding of Buddhist awakening implies for ethics.

NONDUALITY

First, however, it is necessary to spend some time considering what subject-object nonduality means. It is important that such nonduality not be confused with the *monist* view of reality professed by many mystics and questioned by many of their critics. Monism and subject-object nonduality are often found together, but they are different: monism is an ontological claim; nonduality is better understood as an epistemological one because it more directly describes awakened experience. According to this interpretation of Buddhist awakening, our normal awareness of duality—the sense of a separation between "me" and the world "I" find myself "in"—is a delusion. In fact it is the basic delusion that lies at the root of our suffering, for such an illusory sense of self is inherently anxious

and insecure: it can never overcome this basic anxiety any more than I can run away from my own shadow. This is consistent with the Buddhist emphasis on *anātta* (nonself) and on the need to overcome that illusory sense of self. To quote a modern Zen master:

> There is a line a famous Zen master wrote at the time he became enlightened which reads: "When I heard the temple bell ring, suddenly there was no bell and no I, just sound." In other words, he no longer was aware of a distinction between himself, the bell, the sound, and the universe. This is the state you have to reach. . . . Stated negatively, it is the realization that the universe is not external to you. Positively, it is experiencing the universe as yourself.[6]

When there is no sense of self that is inside, there is no outside. In the *Sokushinzebutsu* ("Our Mind is the Buddha") fascicle of the *Shobogenzo*, Dogen described his own experience by quoting the Chinese Ch'an master Yang-shan (d. 916 C.E.): "I came to realize clearly that mind is nothing other than mountains, rivers and the great wide earth, the sun, the moon and the stars." Whether or not this also amounts to a monistic idealism, this has some major ethical implications, of course, especially insofar as the ethical issue is usually understood in terms of the relationship between myself and another, which seems to be denied here.

If our usual sense of duality is a delusion, then nothing needs to be attained. The illusory sense of a separate self merely needs to be dispelled, and one way to do that is to concentrate on something so wholeheartedly that the sense of an "I" that is *doing* it evaporates. This principle too is suggested by Dogen in *Genjokoan* ("Actualizing the Fundamental Point"), the first fascicle of the *Shobogenzo*:

> To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.[7]

"Forgetting oneself" is how we lose our sense of separation and realize that we are not other than the world. Meditation (e.g., *zazen*) is learning to forget the sense of self, which happens when "I" becomes absorbed into "my" meditation-exercise. If sense of self is a result of consciousness reflecting back upon itself in an attempt to grasp itself, such meditation practice makes sense as an exercise in *de-reflection*. Consciousness *un*learns trying to grasp itself, realize itself, objectify itself. Awakening occurs when the usually automatized reflexivity of conscious-

ness ceases, which is experienced as a letting-go and falling into the void. "Men are afraid to forget their minds, fearing to fall through the Void with nothing to stay their fall. They do not know that the Void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma" (Huang-po).[8] Then, when I no longer strive to make myself real through things, I find myself actualized by them: awakened to the possibilities they provide.

In what sense does such a liberation free us from "the world"? It provides a different perspective on the injunction to be "in the world but not of it." From this Buddhist viewpoint, the nondual experience does not transcend the world except in the sense that it reveals what that world is when I am not attached to particular things—especially myself—within it. If mind is "mountains, rivers, earth, the sun, the moon and the stars," this mind is not some transcendental Absolute. It is nothing other than your mind and my mind, when they are realized to be *absolute* in the original etymology of the term: unconditioned. Meditative techniques decondition the mind from its tendency to secure itself by circling in familiar ruts (recurrent thoughts, feelings, desires, etc.), thus freeing it to become anything. The most-quoted line from *Diamond Sutra* encapsulates this in one phrase: "Let mind come forth without fixing it anywhere."

An example of Zen meditation may be helpful here. In the Zen lineage with which I am most familiar, a first *koan* such as Joshu's *Mu* is treated somewhat like a *mantram*. Putting all one's mental energy into "muuu . . ." (repeated mentally during breath exhalations) undermines the sense of self by letting go of the reflective mental processes that sustain it. At the beginning of such practice, one attempts to concentrate on "muuu . . ." but inevitably distractions arise such as thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, and so on. A later, more focused stage is when one can concentrate on "muuu . . ." without losing it: "muuu . . ." effectively keeps other thoughts away. The stage when "both inside and outside naturally fuse" occurs when there is no longer the sense of an "I" that is repeating an objective sound; there is only "muuu . . . ." This stage is sometimes described by saying that *now "muuu . . ." is doing "muuu . . .":* it is "muuu . . ." that sits, walks, eats, and so forth. At this point the teacher may help by cutting the last thread: an unexpected action, such as a blow or shout or even a few quiet words, may startle the student into letting go. "All of a sudden he finds his mind and body wiped out of existence, together with the *koan*. This is what is known as 'letting go your hold'" (Hakuin).[9] One classical Zen story tells how a student was awakened by the sound of a pebble striking bamboo. When the practice is ripe, the shock of an unexpected sensation can help it to penetrate to the very core of one's empty sense of being—that is, it is experienced nondually.

When confirmed by a Zen master, such a nondual experience is called *kensho*, which may be translated as "seeing [one's own true] nature." *Kensho*, however, is not to be equated with the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha, known in Japanese as his

daigotete "great awakening." *Kensho* varies greatly in depth, from "tip of the tongue tastes" to what the Buddha experienced under the Bodhi tree. Usually one's first experience is rather shallow and must be deepened in further meditation practice. These variations in depth are depicted in the ten oxherding pictures. Another common analogy describes meditation as cleaning a pane of glass so dirty that one does not know it is a windowpane; *kensho* is the sudden (it is always sudden) realization that there is something to be seen through the window, and deep enlightenment is when the glass is not only thoroughly polished but shattered, so there is no longer the possibility of further obstruction.

Usually, however, the nondual experience is very brief, a few moments or minutes, followed by a "return" to our more common dualistic way of experiencing the world and ourselves. Despite the frustration that this reversion often involves, something has changed: there is memory of the nondual experience and realization of what that experience has revealed: that *"I" am not other than the world*. In other words, the return is not complete: an awareness of one's own "emptiness" (and the emptiness of phenomena "in" the world) continues, although that can fade away if one's meditation practice does not continue.

This nondual account of Buddhist awakening may (or may not be) persuasive, but it must be emphasized that it (like any other modern approach) is an interpretation. It is not and cannot be "canonical" for the same reason that any other contemporary explanation cannot be: because we know too little about the origins of Buddhism and because Buddhism's subsequent history is too rich to be subsumed into any one interpretation that does justice to all of it. In particular, there has been and continues to be much controversy about whether Buddhist awakening is transcendental (revelatory of another reality) or immanent (merely revealing the true nature of this world). Textually, there is much to be found in the various Buddhist canons and commentaries to support both positions; this nondual approach places me firmly in the latter camp. Needless to say, this debate also has important implications for how we understand mysticism generally. For example, my nondual account of mystical experience hardly fits Schweitzer's critique of Asian mysticism as world-denying. I could even turn such criticisms around and argue that subject-object nonduality is more world-affirming than the usual dualistic understanding that distinguishes me and often alienates me from the world I find myself "in."

While even the Pali texts characterize Śākyamuni's enlightenment in quite different terms, early and later Buddhism agree that the most profound awakenings involve a permanent transformation. For the purposes of this chapter, however, we can ignore the difficult problem of determining precisely what about that transformation is permanent. Even the most devoted Zen students will admit that great awakenings are few and far between, even among those who become Zen teachers. The issue of final perfection is therefore one that can be put aside in order to address something more manageable and more important for

us: the relationship between the nondual experience, understood as above, and morality. What are the ethical implications of *kensho*?

Nondual Ethics

Let us begin by reflecting on a possible parallel. The nondual experience itself is nonreflective and nonconceptual. The philosophical implications of such brief experiences occur afterward, in a cultural context that tends to overdetermine the conclusions one draws from such an experience. A Zen student, for example, is likely to understand her experience in terms of no-self and emptiness—as I have done above. An Advaitin, however, might understand it more subjectively, as a momentary disappearance of *māyā* (the objective world) and revelation of Brahman. A Christian who prays according to the *Cloud of Unknowing* (whose technique is in some ways very similar to *mu koan* practice[10]) is more likely to understand it as being "ravished by the naked being of God himself." In sum (and as William Barnard also notices in chapter 2), very similar nondual experiences can lend themselves to very different and often incompatible ontological conclusions, usually according to the religious context that "frames" the experience.

Although the above claim can be challenged, I do not intend to defend it any further here, for that would divert us from the main issue: *is the same thing true normatively?* Are the ethical implications of nonduality also context-determined? The fact that such experiences are themselves temporary, which means they are followed by a "return" to our more common dualistic experience, suggests a similar return to the normative moral standards of one's group. An important objection, however, may be raised against such ethical relativism. Buddhism generally, and Mahāyāna Buddhism in particular, emphasizes that awakening increases one's awareness of responsibility for the well-being of the world; it is claimed that compassion for its sentient beings arises spontaneously. The nondualist understanding of *kensho*-awakening accounts for this: when I discover that I am interdependent on all other beings—more precisely, that each of us is a *manifestation* of all the others—I realize that my life and destiny cannot be extricated from that of "others" in the world. For Buddhism, then, responsibility for others is natural to the expression of genuine awakening. Hee-Jin Kim explains Dogen's view of the Buddhist precepts as nothing other than such *tathātā* "thusness":

> When morality becomes effortless, purposeless, and playful, it becomes a non-moral morality which is the culmination of Zen practice of the Way in which morality, art, and play merge together. When ought becomes is in the transparency of thusness, only then do we come to the highest morality. Moral excellence as such does not constitute absolute freedom and purity from the religious and metaphysical standpoint. Only when an ought becomes an expression of thusness, does it reach the highest morality.[11]

Such "thusness" is the nonmoral morality of the *bodhisattva*, who, having nothing to gain or lose, is devoted to the welfare of others. Contrary to popular Buddhist belief, then, this concern for others is not a self-sacrifice. The *bodhisattva* knows that no one is really saved until we are all saved. When I am the universe, to help others is to help myself. This, I think, must have been Ramakrishna's point to his disciple (see p. 246): in his Vedāntic terms, by helping others we are only helping our own true self, the God in all. Far from being a reversal of the *tat tvam asi* ("that thou art") ethic, this realization fulfills it. To become enlightened is to forget one's own suffering only to wake up in or rather *one with* a world of suffering. This experience is not sympathy or empathy but *compassion*, literally "suffering with."

What will the meaning of life become for such a person, freed from our usual narcissistic self-preoccupation? What will that nondual freedom, which has nothing to gain or to lose, choose to do? Whether or not Brahmanic mysticism neglected to turn *tat tvam asi* in an ethical direction (as Schweitzer argued), such a critique cannot be made of Buddhism, for the career of the *bodhisattva* is helping others: not because one ought to, but because one *is* the situation and through oneself that situation draws forth a response to meet its needs. Such an awakened being "transcends" normal moral standards because, without our usual sense of a dualistic opposition between self and other, the concern to help "others" arises so naturally and spontaneously that the precept-undertakings are no longer necessary.

Such is the theory, at least. It sounds good, doesn't it? Yet there is nonetheless a serious problem with such compassion and responsibility, at least as I have described them above: they are too abstract and thus their consequences too vague. They too can manifest in very different and even incompatible ways of "helping" the world. For example, one who has *kensho* may give more money to begging street people, or may decide to exercise "ruthless compassion" to discourage that lifestyle. Unfortunately, *kensho* itself does not automatically reveal the best way to really help people—a point that is discussed below. In this way the problems of ethical contextualization and ethical relativism recur. Since social ethics generally emphasize the welfare of one's group, we tend to find ourselves back within the normative ethical standards of our own group—a problem aggravated by Buddhism's adaptability, which particularly in East Asia made Buddhism vulnerable to co-optation by the state and its normative standards.

A good way to exemplify this problem is to contrast early Buddhist emphasis on *ahiṁsa* (noninjury) with the samurai Zen that developed in Japan. For Paul Demieville, their contrast is paradoxical: "The Hīnayāna, which tends to condemn life, has remained strict in the prohibition of killing; and it is the Mahāyāna, which extolls life, that has ended up by finding excuses for killing and even for its glorification."[12] In *Zen and Japanese Culture,* D.T. Suzuki begins his chapter "Zen and the Samurai" by addressing the apparent contradiction between them:

> It may be considered strange that Zen has in any way been affiliated with the spirit of the military classes of Japan. Whatever form Buddhism takes in the various countries where it flourishes, it is a religion of compassion, and in its varied history it has never been found engaged in warlike activities. How is it, then, that Zen has come to activate the fighting spirit of the Japanese warrior?[13]

Zen, explains Suzuki, has never incited samurai to carry on their violent profession, but it has sustained them morally and philosophically when they have "for whatever reason once entered into it." Morally, it sustains them because Zen teaches us not to look backward once one's course is decided upon. Philosophically, it sustains them because Zen is a religion of the will that is indifferent to the problem of life or death. Zen has no other doctrine or philosophy, and

> is therefore extremely flexible in adapting itself to almost any philosophy and moral doctrine as long as its intuitive teaching is not interfered with. It may be found wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism, or any political or economic dogmatism. It is, however, generally animated with a certain revolutionary spirit, and when things come to a deadlock—as they do when we are overloaded with conventionalism, formalism, and other cognate isms—Zen asserts itself and proves to be a destructive force.[14]

The same could hardly be said for Pali Buddhism, which is strict in its prohibition against taking life. The eightfold path includes right action (not destroying life, etc.) and right livelihood (not making one's living through a profession that brings harm to others, such as trading in arms and weapons, soldiering, killing animals, etc.). The *Dhammapada* applies this attitude to war: "The victor breeds hatred, and the defeated lie down in misery. He who renounces both victory and defeat is happy and peaceful" (verse 46).

Depending on how one understands life ("we must transcend the dualistic concepts of life and death") and killing ("*anātta* implies that no one kills and no one is killed"), it is possible to understand these prohibitions in more subtle, or more sophistical, ways. Yet there is "no evidence in what are generally considered to be the fundamental tenets of Buddhism (centered on the Four Noble Truths and Holy Eightfold Path) that would condone an adherent's participation in the killing of other human beings for any reason whatsoever. Thus, Buddhism, at least in its earliest formulation, must be considered to take the position of absolute pacifism as its normative standard of conduct."[15] The life of Śākyamuni Buddha as conveyed in the Nikāyas is completely consistent with such teachings, and

it is inconceivable that he could have lived as a samurai, or that he would have approved of any such use of his teachings.

> The Sangha was organized to be a non-coercive, non-authoritarian, democratic society where leadership came only from good moral character and spiritual insight. It is an order of society which has no political ambitions within the nation, and in whose ranks there is no striving for leadership. It seeks to persuade men and women to follow its way, by example and exhortation, not by force. By completely eliminating the then prevalent caste system from its ranks, Buddha Sakyamuni may rightly be considered one of history's first leaders not only to advocate but actually to practice his belief in the basic equality of all human beings. He clearly hoped that the religious and social ideals of the Sangha would one day permeate the whole of society.[16]

How well have these ideals permeated Japanese Buddhism? Historically, Japan has been very good at adapting to foreign influences, and Buddhism is famously adaptable. This adaptability has been a two-edged sword, enabling Buddhism to permeate other cultures by adapting their religious institutions to its own ends, but also allowing Buddhism to be co-opted (even, in its birthplace, to be assimilated by the "fraternal embrace" of Hinduism, as Coomaraswamy put it). The Mahāyāna doctrine that *saṁsāra* (this world of suffering) is not other than *nirvāṇa* may be understood in opposite ways. Either can be conflated into the other: the true nature of *saṁsāra* may be taken as *nirvāṇa* itself, or *nirvāṇa* redefined in more this-worldly ways that end up rationalizing cravings, nationalism, and subservience to secular authority.

From this perspective, the basic problem with Japanese Buddhism appeared at the very beginning: Buddhism was first brought into Japan by the ruling classes, who saw it as a potent means to preserve the nation—which for them meant their own position, of course. Zen arrived several centuries later, but it continued the elite pattern that by then had been set. After returning from his second trip to China, during which he was ordained as a Rinzai master, Eisai (1141–1215) found that his new type of Buddhism was not acceptable to the Tendai hierarchy at Enryakuji. So he went to Kamakura, where he gained the favor of the widow of the first shogun Minamoto Yoritomo, and she established the first Zen temple in Japan for him. His first major writing was *Treatise on the Spread of Zen for the Protection of the Nation*. (Dogen too wrote a work, now lost, entitled *The Method of Protecting the Country by the True Dharma*.) Only later was he invited back to Kyoto as an honored monk-teacher. If the old stories can be trusted, establishing oneself by currying the favor of the powerful was not the way of Śākyamuni, nor the way of the early Chinese patriarchs (the southern ones, at least), who only

reluctantly answered the requests of emperors to become national teachers. This contact with secular authority is not in itself problematical; according to the Nikāyas Śākyamuni often taught and advised rulers, because his Dharma was respected for itself, as an alternative authoritative Law. The problem arises when Buddhist teachings and prestige are appropriated for other ends, as an ideology that supports the state and justifies privilege and class.

If Śākyamuni believed in the equality of all human beings and hoped saṇgha ideals would come to permeate all of society, the issue of social hierarchy is especially problematical for Japanese Zen, which came to emphasize devotion to one's daimyo lord more than one's personal path of liberation from desire and delusion. Or, more precisely, the two tended to be equated: to let go of oneself was understood to mean identifying completely with one's daimyo. In *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, Winston King points to an inbuilt factor in Buddhism that tended to work against its own teaching that life is sacred: a doctrine of karmic destiny, which meant that a son born into a samurai family was fated to become a samurai himself. "And free as Zen may have been in some respects from the bonds of the Buddhist tradition, it was not free from the bonds of the teaching of karma."[17]

Karma is a complicated issue in Buddhism, and it is too simple to say that Zen encourages us to accept our karma, yet something like that seems to be implied by the repeated exhortation to become one with our immediate circumstances. King also cites the strong sense of family loyalty and tradition, especially among the Japanese upper classes. "I have no desire to attain buddhahood," Yamamoto Tsunetomo, author of the *Hagakure*, wrote *after* he had retired to become a monk. "The sincere resolution deeply engraved on my mind is to be reborn for as many as seven times as a Nabeshima samurai and administer our clan." However praiseworthy this may be as an example of egolessness, it still needs to be asked in what sense Yamamoto is a Buddhist monk. As an endorsement of one's family and occupation, these attitudes become questionable in the light of Śākyamuni's own example—not only when they lead to violating the precept against killing, but because the saṇgha was originally established as an alternative to such family and caste obligations, which Śākyamuni himself had obviated by abandoning his own family and social position.

The problem with accepting one's karmic destiny is that a collective "wego," such as the Japanese understanding of egolessness encouraged, is not intrinsically superior to the individual ego. It may be even more dangerous, depending on where those energies are channelled. The absolute loyalty expected by family heads and daimyo did not extend to interdaimyo relations, for the daimyo did not consider their own compacts to be binding. As King points out, such agreements tended to be marriages of convenience, "a cagey betting on the winner of the next set of battles, cemented by intermarriages and hostages. Hence Japanese military history is full of temporary alliances, broken or shifted when conditions changed."[18]

Suzuki could not help touching on the problem of morality in his *Zen and Japanese Culture* chapters on swordsmanship:

> The sword is generally associated with killing, and most of us wonder how it can come into connection with Zen, which is a school of Buddhism that teaches the gospel of love and mercy. The fact is that the art of swordsmanship distinguishes between the sword that kills and the sword that gives life. The one that is used by a technician cannot go any further than killing, for he never appeals to the sword unless he intends to kill. The case is altogether different with the one who is compelled to lift the sword. For it is really not he but the sword itself that does the killing. He has no desire to do harm to anybody, but the enemy appears and makes himself a victim. It is as though the sword performs automatically its function of justice, which is the function of mercy. This is the kind of sword that Christ is said to have brought among us. It is not meant just for bringing the peace mawkishly cherished by sentimentalists. . . . [This sword] is no more a weapon of self-defense or an instrument of killing, and the swordsman turns into an artist of the first grade, engaged in producing a work of genuine originality.[19]

This is not one of Suzuki's better paragraphs. According to it, selflessness makes the killing sword into a life-giving instrument of righteousness, for the man who has mastered the art does not *use* the sword; thus the opponent may be said to kill himself. "[T]he enemy is filled with the evil spirit of killing and so he is killed by this evil spirit."[20] In the Japanese feudal era, though, were all enemies really evil? And what would happen, then, if feuding daimyo required two enlightened swordmasters to compete? Would each be killed by the selfless sword of the other? Or would only the less selfless be killed?

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Eisai's relationship with the secular powers-that-be developed into a Faustian compact fatal to the original nonviolent spirit of Buddhism. That Zen taught the samurai how to be loyal to their daimyo and how to fight better for their daimyo elevated that social relationship above the most basic Buddhist precept not to kill living beings, especially humans. When we consider all the killing that has occurred on behalf of abstractions such as God and the future socialist utopia, egoless devotion to a particular person can seem attractive; but only until we ask whether what inspired that daimyo was anything more than his (and his clan's) own desires for power, wealth, and prestige. Accepting one's karmic role in such a social system does provide a clear solution to the perennial problem about the meaning of one's life; however, this was not Śākyamuni's solution, which involved withdrawing from the prevalent social system and, by implication, criticizing its preoccupations (including warfare).

The Code of the Samurai exhorts that "one who is a samurai must before all things keep constantly in mind, by day and by night, . . . the fact that he has to die. That is his chief business." No one would deny that Zen should help us to be able to die; yet one must question the other idea implicit here, that this will enable us to kill better. Then did *bushido* provide an ethic, or did it serve in place of an ethic? That is, in what sense did it constitute an ethical system that provided some moral authority tempering secular authority? King quotes Roger Ames: "*bushido*, being centered in this resolution to die, is not in any strict sense an ethical system at all. . . . In essence, it does not represent any particular mode of conduct or normative standards."[21] This may remind us of the *bodhisattva*, whose compassionate activities are not limited by the bounds of conventional morality, yet insofar as Zen did not provide an alternative moral perspective on the hierarchical and exploitative social system, it became coopted by it. As Ames continues: "Of course, historically, the proponent of *bushido*, the samurai, did align himself with a prevailing morality, or more likely was born into circumstances where the decision of moral alignment was predetermined."

This problem did not cease with the Meiji Restoration (1868); on the contrary, the nationalism and state militarism of post-Meiji Japan aggravated the problem, as Brian Victoria points out in his *Zen at War*, which focuses primarily on institutional Buddhism, especially Zen, from 1868 to the present day.[22] During this period the relationships between Zen Buddhism and the state's military aggression were in their "most exaggerated form," but Victoria claims that makes it all the better a test of Zen's social ethics. If so, it is a test that Japanese Zen failed badly. Since many western Zen teachers today were themselves students of figures discussed in this book, it has come as a shock to many Zen communities outside Japan.

After a lethargic decline during the Tokugawa era, when all intrasectarian organizations had been banned, the Meiji period was a wake-up call because state Shinto, constructed as a national cult of morality and patriotism, suddenly provided a challenge to Buddhism's survival. Buddhist institutions responded with "New Buddhism," designed to show that Buddhism too could make a valuable contribution to social and economic development, could promote patriotism and loyalty to the throne, and was compatible with Western science and technology. It was the beginning of a slippery slope. During the early colonial period there was almost no peace movement among Buddhists, while no lack of Buddhist leaders justified such aggression as Japan's duty to "awaken" Korean and Chinese Buddhists from their indifference to war, a passivity due to the "pessimistic nature" of their inferior Buddhism, and to the faulty value of choosing filial piety over loyalty. A 1894 newspaper editorial "Buddhism and War" acknowledged that destroying all weapons of war was the Buddhist ideal, but asserted that Buddhists should support wars fought for a "just cause."

To be fair, Christian institutions in the West were hardly more enlightened during this time, a period of colonial subjugation in Africa and Asia, in which horrific suffering was inflicted on the native populations. Having been forcefully opened by the West, perhaps we should not be surprised that Japan imported not only its technology but its social Darwinist imperialism, competing according to much the same rules, as Japanese leaders understood them. The issue for us today, then, is how much Buddhism was invoked to justify and promote that imperialism, even by supposedly enlightened Zen masters.

D.T. Suzuki's teacher Shaku Soen, a progressive, university-educated *roshi* (Zen master) who portrayed Buddhism as a "universal religion" at the World Parliament of Religions, actively supported the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), justifying it with the usual rationalizations: "War is not necessarily horrible, provided that it is fought for a just and honorable cause, that it is fought for the upholding of humanity and civilization. Many material human bodies may be destroyed, many humane hearts be broken, but from a broader point of view these sacrifices are so many phoenixes consumed in the sacred fire of spirituality, which will arise from the smoldering ashes reanimated, ennobled, and glorified." When Tolstoy wrote asking him to cooperate in appealing for peace, Soen refused and visited the war front to encourage the troops, declaring that "war against evils must be unflinchingly prosecuted till we attain the final aim. In the present hostilities, into which Japan has entered with great reluctance, she pursues no egoistic purpose, but seeks the subjugation of evils hostile to civilization, peace, and enlightenment."[23] Suzuki's first book, published in 1896 when he was twenty-six years old, shows a similar inability to distinguish between nationalist and religious goals.

Their identification with the state was echoed by countless other Zen priests and temples. By 1930 institutional Buddhism was firmly committed to providing ideological support for all military efforts wherever they might occur. The Zen military ideal became personified in the legend of Lieutenant Colonel Sugimoto Goro (1900–1937), an ardent Zen practitioner who died in combat—standing up!—in northern China. The essays in his posthumously published book *Taigi* (*Great Duty*) contrasted the nonexistence of the self with the absolute nature of the emperor. The emperor does not exist for the state, but the state exists for the emperor, who "is the highest, supreme value for all eternity."[24] One might well dismiss him as a benighted ultranationalist, but major Zen masters supported him and his views, including his own teacher Yamazaki Ekiju, head of the Rinzai sect by the end of the war, who praised his practice and compared him to Bodhidharma.

Particularly uncomfortable for me was the conduct of Harada Daiun Sogaku, well-known in the West due to Kapleau's influential *The Three Pillars of Zen*, and my own Dharma great-grandfather. In 1934 he recommended implementing fascist politics and criticized education for making people shallow and "cosmopoli-

tan minded." In 1939 he described the oneness of Zen and war: "[If ordered to] march: tramp tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of Enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]."[25]

Again, what is most discomforting about these examples is not that Soen and Harada support war, but that they invoke Buddhism to justify and promote it. In Soen's case, a terminology appropriate to Armageddon is used to excuse a war of colonial expansion. In Harada's case, the nonduality of self and other—an essential principle of Suzuki's timeless, ahistorical Zen—is used in a way that flatly contradicts the basic spirit of Śākyamuni's teachings. The problem is not so much that Soen and Harada were products of their time, but how much Zen contributed to making and keeping them so.

I think King puts his finger on the problem:

> If, as Suzuki claims, Zen is impatient with all rationalizing and ethicizing and believes only in visceral-intuitive rightness, if it can be (as already noted) "wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism or any political or economic dogmatism," serving any master that happens to be dominant at the time or place where Zen is, can it be called "Buddhist" in any meaningful sense; or is it only a subjective energy-providing technique?
>
> . . . For essentially Zen, with its slight regard for scripture and literary or ritual tradition, has no means of checking its "Buddhist" quality from time to time or maintaining a consistent witness to a good or holy life-pattern.[26]

Harada Sogaku founded the Sanbo Kyodan, which has since become well-known and influential outside Japan due to the missionary efforts of his successors, Yasutani Hakuun and my own teacher Yamada Koun. As a member of this saṅgha, in June 1999 I took part in a Sanbo Kyodan discussion of Victoria's *Zen at War* during a teachers' session held in Kamakura. The most memorable point to emerge, at least for me, was the agreement that *even deep Zen enlightenment is not by itself enough*. In order to live in a truly compassionate way that fulfills one's *bodhisattva* vow, it is also necessary to be educated, in the broadest sense of the term: that is, to be aware of what is happening in one's country and in the world, socially and historically, to ensure that one's concern for others is not distorted by (what I would call) *collective delusions* such as nationalism and militarism. (Today I think we need to add consumerism to this list.) This realization is important for several reasons—not least because it strikes another blow against the view that if we Buddhists just face the wall and meditate, everything will automatically turn out all right.

Can this also give us some insight into the scandals (already mentioned by Kripal in chapter one) that have plagued most of the major U.S. Zen centers, whose teachers (Japanese or Japanese-trained) were discovered to have engaged in sexual and other misconduct? To cite some notorious examples: Shunryu Suzuki's successor as abbot at the San Francisco Zen Center was forced to resign for having a sexual affair with at least one married student and for financial peccadillos; the founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles had numerous affairs with married and unmarried students; the abbot of the New York Zen Center was investigated by a *Village Voice* reporter, who claimed that he made sexual advances to students during *dokusan* (private interviews). I was also told (by a former student of the *roshi* involved) that another Rinzai *roshi*, with major centers in California and New Mexico, had an affair with a senior woman student; when his wife found out and threatened to expose him, he expelled the student, although he had been about to qualify her as a teacher. Evidently Zen training and Zen *kensho* do not in themselves prepare such teachers to deal with the kinds of moral dilemmas and temptations that their positions expose them to in a more individualistic and hedonistic non-Confucian society.

In sum, insofar as the Zen experience "transcends" concepts and ethics and history and emphasizes oneness with one's immediate situation, its practitioners seem more vulnerable to the prevailing ideology and more likely to be coopted by the dominant social system. Then, instead of providing a moral perspective on secular authority, Zen often ends up helping to sacralize secular authority.

The Ethics of *Lack*

All the above seems to support the conclusion that the nondual experience, although implying compassion in principle, implies ethical relativism in practice, which contextualizes and appropriates Buddhist awakening according to prevailing social norms. From such a relativist point of view, one could argue that my moralistic critique of samurai Zen reflects nothing more than my own preference for the social and religious norms of Buddhist India. But I want to challenge such a conclusion by questioning the distinction we usually make between fact and value, in this case our dualism between liberative insight and ethical (or unethical) behavior.[27]

There is an aspect of nondual experience that I have not yet mentioned and that needs to be emphasized: its consequences for the ways our "empty" selves usually try to secure themselves within the world. Insofar as those attempts to secure ourselves are responsible for much of our unethical behavior, nonduality has some specific and significant ethical implications.

If psychotherapy today has greater insight into the dynamics of our mental *dukkha* (repression, transference, etc.), I think that the Buddhist denial of self (*anātta*) points more directly at the root of the problem: not dread of death,

finally—that fear still keeps the feared thing at a distance by projecting it into the future—but the more immediate and terrifying (because quite valid) suspicion each of us has that *"I" am not real right now*. A nondualist understanding of nonself implies a subtle yet significant distinction between fear of death and fear of the void—that is, terror of our own groundlessness, which we become aware of as a sense of *lack* and which motivates our compulsive but futile attempts to ground ourselves in one way or another, according to the opportunities for self-grounding that our particular situations seem to provide.

Although Śākyamuni Buddha did not use psychoanalytic terms, our understanding of the Buddhist denial of self can benefit from the concept of repression and what Freud called the return of the repressed in symbolic form. If something (a mental wish, according to Freud) makes me uncomfortable and I do not want to cope with it consciously, I can choose to ignore or "forget" it. This allows me to concentrate on something else, yet what has been repressed tends to return to consciousness. What is not willingly admitted into awareness irrupts in obsessive ways—symptoms—that affect consciousness with precisely those qualities it strives to exclude. Existential psychologists such as Ernest Becker and Irvin Yalom argue that our primary repression is not sexual desires, as Freud believed, but the awareness that we are going to die. *Anātta* implies a somewhat different perspective.

Buddhism analyzes the sense of self into sets of impersonal mental and physical processes, whose interaction creates the illusion of self-consciousness—that is, that consciousness is the attribute of a self. The death-repression emphasized by existential psychology transforms the Oedipal complex into what Norman Brown calls an Oedipal project: the attempt to become father of oneself, that is, one's own origin. The child wants to conquer death by becoming the creator and sustainer of his/her own life. Buddhism shows us how to shift the emphasis: the Oedipal project is the attempt of the developing sense of self to attain autonomy, to become like Descartes's supposedly self-sufficient consciousness. It is the quest to deny one's groundlessness by becoming one's own ground: the ground (socially conditioned yet nonetheless illusory) I "know" as being an independent self.

Then the Oedipal project derives from our awareness that self-consciousness is not something "self-existing" (*svabhāva*) but something ungrounded—in fact, it is a mental construct. Consciousness is like the surface of the sea, dependent on unfathomed depths that it cannot grasp because it is a manifestation of them. The problem arises when this conditioned consciousness wants to ground itself—that is, to make itself *real*. Since the sense of self "inside" is a never-secure construct, its efforts to realize itself are attempts to objectify itself in some fashion in the world. The ego-self is this neverending project to realize oneself by objectifying oneself, something consciousness can no more do than a hand can grasp itself, or an eye see itself.

The consequence of this perpetual failure is that the sense of self is shadowed by a sense of *lack*, which it always tries to escape. The return of the repressed in

the distorted form of a symptom shows us how to link this basic yet hopeless project with the symbolic ways we try to make ourselves real in the world. We experience this deep sense of *lack* as the feeling that "there is something wrong with me," but that feeling manifests, and we respond to it, in many different ways. In its "purer" forms *lack* appears as what might be called an ontological guilt or anxiety that gnaws on one's very core. For that reason ontological guilt wants to become guilt *for* something, because then we know how to atone for it; and anxiety is eager to objectify into fear *of* something, because we have ways to defend ourselves against particular feared things.

The tragedy of these objectifications, however, is that no amount of X can ever be enough if it is not really X we want. When we do not understand what is actually motivating us—because what we *think* we need is only a symptom of something else—we end up compulsive. Such a Buddhist analysis implies that no satisfactory mental health can be gained except by resolving the sense of *lack* that shadows the sense of self, which is what the Buddhist path (including the precepts) addresses.

Then the neurotic's anguish and despair are not the result of his symptoms but their source. Those symptoms are necessary to shield him from the tragedies that the rest of us are better at repressing: death, meaninglessness, groundlessness. "The irony of man's condition is that the deepest need is to be free of the anxiety of death and annihilation [*lack*]; but it is life itself which awakens it, and so we must shrink from being fully alive."[28] If the autonomy of self-consciousness is a delusion that can never quite shake off its shadow-feeling that "something is wrong with me," it will need to rationalize that sense of inadequacy somehow.

This shifts our focus from the terror of future annihilation to the anguish of a groundlessness experienced here and now. On this account, even fear of death and desire for immortality symbolize something else: they become symptomatic of our vague intuition that the ego-self is not a hard core of consciousness but a mental construction, the axis of a web spun to hide the void.

In Buddhist terms, the ego-self is delusive because, like everything else, it is an impermanent manifestation of interdependent phenomena, yet *it feels alienated from that interconditionality*. The basic difficulty is that insofar as I feel separate (i.e., an autonomous, self-existing consciousness) I also feel uncomfortable, because an illusory sense of separateness is inevitably insecure. It is this inescapable trace of nothingness in my "empty" (because not really self-existing) sense of self that is experienced as a sense of *lack*. In reaction, the sense of self becomes preoccupied with trying to make itself self-existing, in one way or another.

According to Otto Rank, contemporary man [sic] is neurotic because he suffers from a consciousness of sin (read *lack*) just as much as premodern man did, but without believing in the religious conception of sin, which leaves us without a means to expiate our sense of guilt (*lack*). Why do we need to feel guilty and accept suffering, sickness, and death as condoning punishment? What

role does that guilt play in determining the meaning of our lives? "The ultimate problem is not guilt but the incapacity to live. The illusion of guilt is necessary for an animal that cannot enjoy life, in order to organize a life of nonenjoyment."[29] Even a feeling of wrongdoing gives us some sense of control over our own destinies, because an explanation has been provided for our sense of *lack*. We need to project our *lack* onto something, because only thus can we get a handle on it.

In contrast to the Semitic religions, Buddhism does not reify the sense of *lack* into an original sin, although our problems with attachment and ignorance are historically conditioned. Śākyamuni Buddha declared that he was not interested in the metaphysical issue of origins and emphasized that he had one thing only to teach: *dukkha* and how to end it. This suggests that Buddhism is best understood as a way to resolve our sense of *lack*. Since there was no primeval offense and no divine expulsion from the Garden, our situation turns out to be paradoxical: our worst problem is the deeply repressed fear that our groundlessness/no-thing-ness is a problem. When I stop trying to fill up that hole at my core by vindicating or realizing myself in some symbolic way, something happens to it—and therefore to me.

Some ironies are evident here. The first is that since the sense of self cannot directly secure itself by grasping itself (for there is nothing to grasp), this quest is directed outward, into the objective world, which in fact becomes objectified (and the self subjectified) by our attempts to identify with and fixate on particular things *in* the world. Developmentally, the sense of self is internalized in childhood from others' opinions of us, and we remain acutely vulnerable to others' views. This makes the quest to become real normally take the form of attempts to gain others' approval or submission: the desire to show off one's money and possessions, or become famous, or gain power over others. To be famous is not only to be loved by many anonymous people, as Freud put it; it is also to feel *more real* because our existence is acknowledged by so many others. The same applies to "status symbols." Many of the people who own a Mercedes-Benz do so not just because it is a good car; they want to be the kind of person who drives a Mercedes. Such desires feed on our basic insecurity, which according to Buddhism is susceptible only to a spiritual solution, because it ultimately derives from our intuition of selflessness, of our ungroundedness.

That brings us to the second irony. No sense of self can ever eliminate the sense of *lack* that inevitably shadows it insofar as it is illusory, but from the awakened point of view my struggle to succeed cannot be successful because I am already grounded *in the totality*. Buddhism implies that I am groundless and ungroundable insofar as delusively feeling myself to be separate from the world; yet I have always been fully grounded insofar as I am nondual with the world. With that conflation, the no-thing at my core is transformed from a sense of lack into a serenity that is imperturbable because nothing is there to be perturbed.

A mind that seeks to ground itself by fixating on something dooms itself to perpetual dissatisfaction, for the impermanence of all things means no such perch can be found. But since it is our sense of lack that compels us to seek such a perch, the end of our lack allows a change of perspective. The solution is a different way of experiencing the problem: in Hegelian terms, this is the "free-ranging variable" that always has some finite determination but is not bound to any particular one. The "bad infinite" of lack transforms into the "good infinite" of a variable that needs nothing. In Buddhist terms, this transforms the alienation of a reflexive sense of self always trying to fixate itself into the freedom of an "empty" mind that can become anything because it does not need to become something.[30]

This has been a long digression, but, when understood in this way, the nondual experience strikes at the source of much of our immoral behavior because it challenges (and at its best uproots) many of the motivations that incline us to act unethically. Insofar as one's *kensho* is genuine—insofar as one has truly let go of oneself—there should be less grasping at symbolic ways of trying to become real, because of the realization that there is no self that could become real or needs to become real. Money, for example, has obviously become one of our most important and compulsive forms of symbolic reality, but a truly awakened person does not need to ground herself in this symbolic form and so will not be obsessed with it, motivated to do whatever is necessary to gain it. The same point can be made about the desires for fame and power. "Because the public image comes to stand as the only valid certification of being, the celebrity clings to his image as the rich man clings to his money—that is, as if to life itself" (Lewis Lapham). In that case, however, the experience of nonduality should also undermine the need to become famous or powerful.[31]

Yet not all of our behavior is motivated by a conscious or subconscious need to fill up one's sense of lack and become real. Less symbolic and more sensual, instinctual cravings—for example, food, alcohol, and sex—might be less accessible to such pacification. And that fits the empirical evidence that comes to mind, including the American Zen examples cited earlier. A quick mental survey of well-known Buddhist teachers in the West supports my suspicion that their main ethical problems tend to be alcohol abuse and, especially, sexual misconduct. This too is ironic, given the importance placed on abstaining from both in the early Buddhist saṅghas. In the Theravāda tradition sex has always been considered the archetypal example of sensuality that needs to be overcome. A Theravādin monk or nun who has sexual relations (genital contact) with another person is deemed to have expelled himself or herself from the saṅgha.

Then perhaps it is also no coincidence that in the West, at least, sex and alcohol seem to be greater temptations for Zen and Tibetan teachers—both forms of Mahāyāna—than for Theravāda and vipassana teachers, whose meditative practices are based more on the Pali tradition, which emphasizes the strict observance of rules. On the Mahāyāna side, and in addition to the already-mentioned abuses

of U.S. Zen teachers, the abbot of ZCLA was also an alcoholic; the influential Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa did not hide his habit of sleeping with many students and consuming large amounts of alcohol; and another well-known Tibetan teacher, who wrote a very popular book about life and death in the Tibetan tradition, settled out of court with a former woman student who claimed she had been sexually abused by him.

Part of the problem is that sex and alcohol can seem to be private consensual matters that need not interfere with one's bodhisattva role. And it is true that we should not confuse social morality—what is customary—with the more formless concern-to-help-others that is the hallmark of every genuine Buddhist teacher. But recently we have become sensitive to the ways unequal power relationships and transference-vulnerability interfere with free consent and usually make teacher-student sex a form of abuse. Alcohol is the most popular drug in most societies, and for many people it becomes a necessity for day-to-day psychic survival. The fact that it is physically addicting means it is potentially dangerous to all those who indulge in large amounts, no matter how awakened or liberated they may otherwise be.

To sum up, the nondual *kensho*-experience has various ethical implications, because the issue of ethical behavior covers a wide variety of activities. According to Buddhism, letting go of myself and realizing my nonduality with the world leads to spontaneous compassion and responsibility for other beings, yet these can manifest in very different and incompatible ways according to one's culture and character. Realizing my emptiness and diminishing my sense of self's sense of *lack* tend to undermine the compulsiveness of the ways we try to make ourselves real—ways that motivate much of our unethical behavior. More physical, instinctive sensuality, however, may be less susceptible to such a resolution. This suggests, at the very least, that it is unwise for those on a spiritual path to speak too glibly about "transcending" morality. Whether or not moral precepts are like bicycle training wheels that may eventually be removed, they have an important function for all except perhaps the most deeply awakened.

Notes

1. The last proposition of Spinoza's *Ethics* (book V, no. 42) begins: "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself."
2. Although the Pali texts include many statements describing awakening, it is not possible to determine the exact nature of Śākyamuni's *nirvāṇa* from them. The Japanese scholar Ui Hakuju extracted a list of fifteen different explanations from the Pali sources. According to the three most important ones, Śākyamuni attained his awakening by (1) understanding the four noble truths, (2) realizing the twelve links of *pratītya-samutpāda* dependent-origination, and/or (3) mastering the four *jhana* trances and gaining three superhuman powers. See Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 27–28. For important examples in the original texts, see *Majjhima Nikāya* suttas 26 and 36, *Digha Nikāya* sutta 14, and *Samyutta Nikāya* suttas 22 and 38.

3. See, for example, *Digha Nikāya* sutta 22: ii 314–15.
4. See, for example, Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), especially the chapter by Dan Lusthaus, "Critical Buddhism and Returning to the Sources," 30–55.
5. *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988; softcover reprint by Humanities Press, 1997).
6. Yasutani Haku'un, in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, edited by Philip Kapleau (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1966), 107, 137.
7. *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), "Genjo-koan," 70.
8. *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, trans. John Blofeld (London: Buddhist Society, 1958), 41.
9. Quoted in D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism* (New York: Anchor, 1956), 148. For more on this process, see Yasutani's "Commentary on the Koan Mu" in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 71–82.
10. See D. Loy, "A Zen Cloud? Comparing Zen Koan Practice with *The Cloud of Unknowing*" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9 (January 1990).
11. Hee-jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), 294.
12. Paul Demieville, "Le Bouddhisme et la guerre," *Mélanges* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1957), 353.
13. D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959/1973), 61.
14. Ibid., 61, 63.
15. Brian (Daizen) Victoria, "The Modern State and Warfare: Is There a Buddhist Position?" in *1990 Anthology of Fo Kuang Shan International Buddhist Conference*, 378.
16. "The Modern State and Warfare," 369.
17. Winston King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 33. My discussion of samurai Zen borrows from my review of King's book: "Is Zen Buddhism?" in *The Eastern Buddhist* 28, no. 2 (Autumn 1995).
18. *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 132.
19. *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 145.
20. Ibid., 180.
21. *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 125.
22. Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997).
23. Shaku Soen, *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot: Addresses on Religious Subjects*, translated by D.T. Suzuki (New York: Weiser, 1971), 211–12. The full text was originally published in 1906 and taken from a memorial address for those who died in the war.
24. *Zen at War*, 117.
25. Ibid., 137.
26. *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 190–91.
27. Although there is no space here to argue for it, I would argue that the fact-value dualism is not a truism but a fallacy: a historically conditioned misunderstanding implied by a mechanistic and objectified understanding of what is. The philosophical difficulty with seeing this is that the nonduality between "fact" and "value" is less logical than existential: we decide how to live in the world (our values) according to our understanding of the nature of the world (the facts). From such a perspective, Schweitzer's sharp distinction between a higher but amoral mystical truth and a lower ethical truth perhaps reveals less about the dualism between East and West than it does about an internal tension in the modern West between science (fact) and religion (value).
28. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 66.
29. Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 240.
30. For more on this, see David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism and Buddhism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996), especially chaps. 1 and 5.
31. Lewis Lapham, *Money and Class in America* (New York: Ballantine, 1988), 230.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Sage in the World, the Perfected without Feelings: Mysticism and Moral Responsibility in Chinese Religion

by Livia Kohn

Introduction

According to a story I heard from a Zen master in Japan, there once was an enlightened master traveling incognito who came to live in an inner-city slum. There he shared a small house with a prostitute, a thief, and a beggar. They were slatternly and aggressive, fighting over every little chore. The master, without criticizing or even raising his eyebrows, defused their conflicts by simply taking over whatever task was at hand and provided a nicer environment for them by cleaning up. He was just there, helping and supporting, lending an ear when desired, staying away when not wanted. Over a period of several months, not only did the household gain a modicum of internal harmony but the moral quality of its members changed: the beggar took on some part-time work, the thief found himself an honest trade, and the prostitute became a waitress. Once they were set up in their new mode of life, the master simply faded away, moving on to new slums and other suffering beings.

The story, while fairly modern and popular in a Japanese Zen enviroment, contains a key to the understanding of the intrinsic and necessary interaction of mysticism and morality in traditional Chinese religion. First, the enlightened master, the one who has realized the Tao and is pure in his deepest being, is incognito; he goes unrecognized and does not make a show of his attainments nor does he present any formal set of rules or teachings. His main characteristic, second, is his humility, his ability to be there when most needed yet leave again when unwanted. His transformative power, third, comes not from formal rules, lengthy lectures, or vocal criticisms but from his own actions, his taking on what-

ever is needed without fuss. He does not pass judgment on the world, he does not consciously set out to change it, but simply by being who he is and where he is, the world is judged and changed. His mere presence, fourth, creates a morally better world, a world where people live in greater harmony, higher honesty, and better cheer, and do less harm to themselves and to others.

The reason why the master can be who he is and do what he does is found in the underlying worldview of traditional China, which also applies to Zen Buddhism. According to this, the world is fundamentally good and inherently harmonious. Created in a series of transformations without a radical break from the pure, formless Tao, it manifests itself in a wondrous and mysterious combination of manifold forces and beings that ideally work together to constitute a perfect cosmos—as and when each realizes its nature as originally part of the Tao. This cooperation of all things and beings in the universe is a given, but any particular individual can realize its pure Tao-nature to a lesser or higher degree. The master in our story, or any kind of mystic or realized person in this system, then, is one who has realized his or her Tao-nature to perfection, is naturally who he was meant to be, and can radiate the purity of the underlying cosmic goodness to all around him. The members of the slum household, in contrast, have not realized their true potential, have become removed from the inherent harmony of the Tao and thus developed patterns of disharmony and immorality. Still, because they too are part of the system as a whole, which is ultimately one, they are immediately affected by the condensed power of purity embodied in the master and transform, over time and without consciously wishing or even noticing it, to a higher degree of goodness and harmony.

The goodness of the cosmos, to move one step further, here is not necessarily a moral goodness, a goodness that can be expressed in a set of rules and enforced by laws and other restraints. The goodness of the cosmos goes beyond human morality because it is cosmic and natural, and both cosmos and nature are cruel and unjust at times, they do not have a set of values that can be defined or to which they can be held. At the same time, the goodness of the cosmos is intuited by human beings as a sense of well-being and inner harmony, which, if it is to be achieved with limited sensory and intellectual faculties, can and is expressed in moral rules. Morality is thus a part of the cosmic harmony that the mystic embodies, and his being in the world increases the moral quality of life around him. Nevertheless, the mystic is not per se moral, but rather transmoral or supramoral, going beyond the demands of human society in a spontaneous sense of cosmic oneness.

The various traditions of Chinese religion all share this fundamental vision and show a strong sociopolitical and thus also moral concern in their conviction that ideal human beings, those who have fully realized the true nature of the cosmos as understood by them, have a direct impact if not actually a political function in the world. The most important traditions, then, are Confucianism

and classical Taoism in ancient times (500–200 B.C.E.), religious Taoism in the Middle Ages (200–900 C.E.), and Neo-Confucianism of the Song through Ming dynasties (960–1644). In the following pages, I present some concepts held by these traditions, describing the sage in the world, the perfected without feelings, and the immortal of utter freedom.

The Sage in the World

The sage (*sheng*), in the literal interpretation of the character, is the master or king of ears and mouth, the one whose senses are perfectly attuned to the movings of the cosmos, who can recognize and understand signs that others hardly notice and who will elucidate them for others. Thus, as Kenneth DeWoskin says:

> The consummately refined sensory skill of the sage was his hearing; it was perhaps the most important means by which his sagacity was made apparent to the world. He had the ability to hear the faintest tones, distinguish the finest interval, and judge the subtlest qualities of timbre.[1]

Not only can the sage hear the inaudible sounds of the depth of the universe, he can also know its intimate signs. As the *Lüshi chunqiu* has it,

> The knowledge of the sage reaches for millennia into the past and the future—he is not guessing at things; he always has reasons for what he says. (20.22a)

The sage is thus one who knows, who serves the world by bringing hidden realities to the surface, revealing the supersensory, the intuitional and hidden realities of things. He does so by means of the senses and gives verbal explanations, but his intuitional oneness goes beyond both senses and words in a kind of mystical union that enables him to recognize the true patterns inherent in the world and be one with them.

The notion of the sage is a key concept in ancient Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, and philosophical Taoism. In the first, he is ideally identical with the ruler, the key mediator between heaven and humanity and bringer of order not only to himself and a selected few but to the empire at large. As a ruler, he puts his task before any personal needs, and may appear harsh or inhuman in his actions while ultimately working for the larger good of the world. A classical example here is the sage-ruler Yu, the first emperor of the legendary Xia dynasty, who lived at the time of the great flood. Working with a large crew around the country, chiseling through mountains and plains to allow the billows to flow off into the ocean, he passed his own home three times: the first time he heard his infant son,

newly born during his absence, wail; the second time he saw him play in the mud; the third time he spoke to him, then ten years old, refusing his wish to join his father. All three times Yu passed but did not stop, being aware of his personal concerns but not giving in to them and behaving with impersonal distance to those his dearest. Apparently uncaring and even immoral, he was yet true to himself as part of the larger workings of the cosmos in his great task of controlling the flood. Although he had become almost inhuman to the people around him, he was the representative of something higher and bigger, something that went beyond the moral or humane concerns of the world.[2]

Just as "Heaven and earth are not humane, and treat the myriad beings as straw dogs [things without value]" (*Daode jing* 5), so the sage, at one with heaven and earth, is not humane and often treats people roughly. He is the "apogee of human relationships" who has developed the roots of goodness, which all people have within them, to their limits (*Mencius* 4a.2). He is thus moral in his basic attitude toward life but transmoral when it comes to the realization of his higher, cosmic purpose. Because the sage goes beyond ordinary morality, he is not bound by the rules of society. As the medieval thinker Sun Zhuo explains, the sage may even kill because his actions are performed in a state of oneness with the cosmos, of no-mind, that is, without personal, clinging, self-interested intention. Whatever a sage does will therefore not leave the same violent impact that it would have if committed by a lesser man. His perfection of humaneness is at the same time the complete obliteration of humaneness, "his greatest filial piety is the complete forgetfulness of filial piety."[3]

Not every sage, however, is a ruler. According to the ancient Confucian system, he could also be philosopher, one who thinks through the principles of the cosmos and explains them to others. These others then write his ideas down—which is why the writings of the philosophers, as the teachings of the great Confucius himself, often appear short and disconnected.[4] In addition, there may also be people without any special social function who have the inborn quality of sagehood, the so-called inner sages who stay withdrawn and private, and those who are not born sages but, as all human beings part of the unity of the cosmos, have begun to develop their sage potential. All these have an impact on their surroundings because it is part of their inner nature to pursue and perfect self-cultivation. This is first spelled out in the "Daxue" (Great Learning) chapter of the *Liji* (Book of Rites), describing the effects of personal investigation and cultivation:

> When things are investigated, knowledge is extended. When knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere. When the will is sincere, the mind will be rectified. When the mind is rectified, the personal life will be cultivated. When the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated. When the family is regulated, the state will be in order.

> When the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world. (Sect. 1)[5]

Any effort at self-cultivation thus increases the inherent sage potential within the human being and thereby contributes to the greater goodness of the universe. This vision of the sage as the active practitioner of self-cultivation later became the key notion of Neo-Confucianism, which actively encouraged the pursuit of sagehood by any educated person and saw the utterly moralized cosmos as its highest goal. Here sagehood was at least as much a matter of effort as of inherent potential; and the mystical improvement of the moral quality of one's life became an active part of the goodness of the cosmos, the more inhuman or radical aspects of the cosmic power being relegated in favor of moral values. The conjuction of mysticism and morality in the Chinese tradition is most obvious here.[6]

The subtle and not necessarily moral impact of the sage, however, is described in more detail in the ancient Taoist tradition. The *Daode jing* (Book of the Tao and Its Virtue) ascribed to the philosopher Laozi, although it too tends to see the sage as ruler, does yet remain open about his role and places a higher emphasis on his transformative power, in whatever postition he may find himself. Thus it says:

> The sage in all affairs rests in nonaction,
> And practices the teaching of no words.
> The myriad beings are active through him—
> He does not turn away from them.
> They live through him—
> He does not take possession of them.
> The sage acts in the world, but does not depend on it,
> His task accomplished, he does not stay with it.
> And because he does not stay,
> It remains. (chap. 2)

Here the sage is one who is unobtrusive, inactive, and independent, free from all possessions or attachments and without a formal teaching or program of action.[7] Because he is all these things, which match him to the natural forces of heaven and earth, "the sage is whole" (chap. 22) and his accomplishments are thorough and long-lasting and have a deep and permanent effect on the society around him. Part of these effects is that he imposes some of the same qualities on the people, "causing them to be unknowing and free from desires, so that the smart ones will not dare to impose" (chap. 3). He is "always there to help the people, rejecting no one and no creature" (chap. 27), never puts himself forward in any way yet finds himself a nucleus of social and cosmic activity. As the text has it,

Not presenting himself, he is radiant.
Not thinking himself right, he is famous.
Not pushing himself forward, he is meritorious.
Not pitying himself, he is eminent. (chap. 22)

Not only unobtrusive and withdrawing, the sage also has his particular transformative power because of his transmoral nature, which refuses to make ordinary judgments. Thus he can say of himself:

The good, I treat with goodness;
The bad, I treat with equal goodness.
Thus my virtue is full of goodness.

The honest, I treat with honesty;
The dishonest, I treat with equal honesty.
Thus my virtue is full of honesty. (chap. 49)

This, as interpreted in the fifth-century *Xisheng jing* (Scripture of Western Ascension), indicates a fundamental voidness of moral judgment:

Laozi said: Whether one of the hundred families does anything good, I don't know. Whether one of the hundred families does anything evil, I don't know. Whether anybody practices loyalty or good faith, I don't know. (chap. 37)

The philosopher here refuses to say whether anything is good, evil, or virtuous by common human standards, yet the same passage also has him say that "the Tao of heaven is supported only by good people," indicating that there is a level of goodness, honesty, or virtue that is transmoral and at the root of cosmic functioning. In other words, the goodness of the hundred families is a different goodness from that of the Tao. The Tao is supported only by good people, but this value judgment is not based on what is commonly described as good and evil in the ordinary world of everyday life. The sage goes beyond the standards of social existence, he does not "know" whether anybody is doing anything good or bad at any given point. But he is sure that the accumulation of good will lead to good while that of evil will lead to evil, the basic law of the cosmos being at work throughout and observable by everyone. As people then are influenced by the sages among them or improved by the practice of self-cultivation, the moral goodness of everyday life gradually contributes to the greater goodness of the universe. The sage, himself beyond moral standards in his oneness with heaven and earth, thus nevertheless is a strong pillar of morality within the world and for those around him.

The Perfected without Feelings

Another mystical figure of traditional China is the perfected, realized one, or true man (*zhenren*), who is first described in the ancient Taoist text *Zhuangzi* (Writings of Master Zhuang) and later becomes important in the medieval Taoist religion. The major characteristic of this figure is his complete lack of feelings, which makes him an equal of the Tao. Although "the Tao gave him a human face and heaven gave him a human body, he does not let [feelings of] likes and dislikes enter and harm himself" (chap. 5) but preserves his essence and attains long life and a peace of mind that matches heaven and earth. More interested in the inner workings of the perfected mind than in the social and political impact of the sage, the *Zhuangzi* gives a psychological description how the perfected remains free from worries and the ordinary emotions of life:

> The perfected does not fight if he has little, does not grow proud if he has much. He never plans his affairs. He is able to make a mistake and not feel bad about it, attain success and not claim credit for it, climb into high places and not get nervous, enter water and not get wet, enter fire and not get burned. All this is because his knowledge is part of the Tao itself.
>
> The perfected sleeps without dreaming and wakes without worrying. He eats without delighting in the taste and breathes very deep. . . . He does not know how to delight in life or loathe death. He comes into the world without pleasure and goes again without refusal. (chap. 6)[8]

This quality of the perfected comes from his mind being utterly concentrated and empty, from his attainment of a kind of mystical union described as complete forgetfulness: "I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Tao" (chap. 6). No sense of ego-identity remains in this person, thus he is without feelings, similar to the mystics described in other religious traditions who are said to place their faith in something higher than themselves, go along with life, and never be afraid of death. Utterly equanimous in all situations, they have freedom and peace within, trust in the deity and compassion for all creatures without. Never striving for anything, never regretting anything, they encompass a personality that is beyond common humanity and fully at one with the universe. Larger than life, they represent the complete realization of life; one with the deity, with the Tao, they are more than mere humans. More than human, they are also no longer moral agents, because being free from feelings they have no conscience or other inner root where moral rules could take hold.

As the perfected are mainly recognized by their inner psychological state, they may appear in any form and social status and express their perfection in a variety of different ways. The classical description found in the *Zhuangzi* is in terms of the superb skills of a master craftsman, as for example Cook Ding's carving of an ox. He says of his skill:

> What I care about is the Tao, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and do not look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop, and spirit moves where it wants. I go along fully with the natural make-up. (chap. 3)[9]

Here the forgetfulness of the perfected mind is realized in a highly practical, everyday skill, so that the craftsman no longer sees his work object or is even conscious of himself wielding his tool. Instead, having given up perception and self-definition in favor of the all-pervasive Tao, he lets himself be carried along by its currents and moves fully in tune with nature itself. Thus his carving is perfect, his knife never slips. The same applies also to the art of woodworker Qing who only goes out to cut wood for a new bell-stand after having purified himself for a week:

> When I have fasted [in mind and body] for three days, I no longer have any thought of congratulations or rewards, titles or stipends. When I have fasted for five days, I no longer have any thought of praise or blame, skill or clumsiness. And when I have fasted for seven days, I am so still that I forget I have four limbs and a form and body. By that time, the ruler and his court no longer exist for me. My skill is concentrated and all outside distractions fade away. (chap. 19)[10]

The perfected without feelings is thus a figure of high mental purity who applies his forgetfulness of self in all he does but specifically in the daily arts and techniques of his trade. His actions and convictions are entirely unmoral, the only thing that counts is his oneness with the Tao and the degree to which cosmic power flows through him. Nevertheless, by exercising his perfection within everyday activities, he makes the world a truer and more harmonious place, thus contributing again, not unlike the sage, to a greater goodness among ordinary people.

The quality of the perfected as an energy center of cosmic power also makes him long-lived and even immortal, able to join the course of the stars and fly ecstatically off to the heavens. As Master Guangchengzi says in the *Zhuangzi*:

> I enter the gate of the inexhaustible and wander in the limitless fields, form a triad with the light of the sun and the moon, partake in the constancy of heaven and earth. What stands before me I mingle with, what is far from me I leave in darkness. All other men may die, but I alone remain! (chap. 11)

This inner sense of oneness with the Tao and eternal participation in the cosmic flow further characterizes the perfected as a being without relations, one who has "seen his aloneness" and is without opposite, "standing beside heaven and earth and at-one with all" (chap. 1). He is not by choice or in any way socially active, nor even very conscious of the society around him, whose occasional intrusion he either indulges tolerantly or rejects impatiently; he does not evaluate anyone or anything, nor does he expect to be judged, his actions being nothing but expressions of the pure flow of the Tao.

People encountering such a perfected, however, will see someone whose movements are like natural processes, who appears not to be doing anything actively by himself but to be carried along fully by the Tao. Free from self, free from merit, free from fame (chap. 6), he leaves no traces or teachings behind and cannot be used as an example by later generations. He neither changes anything in the world through the way he lives nor does he act upon others, his deeds being as fleeting and as invisible as the Tao itself. People will also see him as a gentle, maybe slightly mad person who rests in tranquility of mind whatever he does. He will, as the *Zhuangzi* commentator Guo Xiang puts it, "mystically accept all that he encounters and never rouse his mind," "never experience any opposition in the world," but "go along perfectly with the mildness and severity of heat and cold and never let them enter upon his mind."[11]

At the same time, he may also look like a cautious and reasonable person who never uses his powers of mind unless forced to do so. His ability to enter water and not get wet, enter fire and not get burned, then, is not so much a magical feat or even an expression of the power of the concentrated mind but the result of natural caution. As Guo Xiang says, the perfected would

> naturally walk on dry land without, however, purposely avoiding water; he naturally would be far away from fire without, however, intentionally running away from it. Even though he might not feel heat as heat, he would never run towards a fire . . . or plunge into water, or endanger his life in any other way." (chap. 6)

Still, if it came to the crunch, he would emerge unscathed, being utterly free from fear and totally concentrated in mind.

Not seeking anything out, whether good or bad, the perfected would yet commonly encounter useful and positive situations in life, always stepping into good fortune and never being befallen by calamities (chap. 17). One with nature, he would never harm any living being, so when "he steps among wild beasts, they are not disturbed; when he comes across wild birds, they do not fly away" (chap. 5). Fully in harmony with the inner nature given to him by the Tao, he follows the natural life course laid out for him and never encounters anything that is not appropriate or cannot be handled. His whole existence, unknowing and without self, is blessed and fortunate; he is at one with himself as part of the eternal Tao.

The social relevance of such a person, beyond morality in his thinking and acting and not responsible in society or for it, even if he has a position or skill to maintain, lies first in the inner harmony he spreads by just being who he is and second in his being a model of perfection for others, from whom they can—not by active instruction but by outside observation—gain inspiration on how to be at one with the Tao and fully realize one's existence on earth. If that happens, as Guo Xiang says, "if everyone follows his so-being and rests in utmost accordance[with the Tao], then wise and foolish, aggression and love, noble and humble, coming and going, ruler and minister, up and down—all will be perfected to the utmost. Then there will be no more suffering under heaven!" (chap. 11).[12] The perfected without feelings, a transmoral being of cosmic consciousness, thus can serve as an inspiration to others, as an example of how life without suffering can be possible. Inspired by him and following his attainments, all people can find perfection, which in turn will create a perfect society on earth.

The medieval Taoist religion, in a further development of this ideal, locates the vision of social perfection in the heavens, where the perfected and immortals reside next to the gods in a celestial assembly that is free from the strife and suffering of the common world. Attainment of mystical union and the perfected consciousness on earth is then, after the body has been shaken off or transformed into pure heavenly energy, continued in an eternal existence among the celestials, from where inspiration can be given to humanity through the appearance of mysterious signs or direct revelations of knowledge and scriptures. The perfected in heaven, like their counterparts on earth, thus can have an impact on the purity and moral well-being of human society, but their own quality, as part of the Tao, is beyond morality, and whatever transformations they may work among humanity is by subtle example or mysterious indication only, never by active guidance, rulership, or teachings, as might be given by the sage.[13]

The Immortal of Utter Freedom

The most important mystical figure of religious Taoism is the immortal, an ideal that developed after the model of shamans and mountain recluses. The character for "immortal" (*xian*) accordingly shows a man next to a mountain or, in an

older version, a figure dancing with flying sleeves. Immortals appear on the scene only in the late Zhou and early Han dynasties when concepts of the immortality of the soul were expanded to include physical forms of long and even eternal life, various indigenous tribes were found to possess arts of making the body stronger and lighter, and contacts with other cultures enhanced the belief in a magical paradise of pure power where wondrous figures live that nourish on energy and can appear and disappear at will.[14]

Immortals are characterized by their reclusive nature, which makes them inhabitants of deep mountains or far-off islands, by their close relationship to animals, documented in depictions of feathered or furred figures on Han dynasty mirrors, and by their complete control over physical functions of the body, which includes not only the practice of gymnastics and breathing exercises but also magical powers of multilocation and invisibility. They are described in several early hagiographic collections, notably the *Liexian zhuan* (Immortals' Biographies) and the *Shenxian zhuan* (Biographies of Spirit Immortals),[15] and come in two major types, earthly and celestial. The former are reclusive and often eccentric practitioners of longevity techniques who have withdrawn to the mountains but may on occasion reappear to exorcise demons or effect faith healings; the latter reside in heavenly paradises and descend every so often on a whim to bring a bit of magic to the world.

Morality enters the realm of the immortals on two levels: as a prerequisite for immortality training and as an aspect of accomplished immortals' activities. Although similar to the sages and perfected as inherently transmoral beings, immortals have yet to prove certain moral qualities in their character before being accepted as worthy disciples and allowed to undergo training. Several stories, both in ancient and late medieval literature, document this fact. The most popular and detailed among them is the biography of Lü Dongbin, leader of the Eight Immortals, who was subjected to ten tests. For example,

> Once Lü, at the time of the New Year, was leaving his house to be accosted by a beggar demanding alms. He handed over all [the presents] he carried, cash and gifts in kind. But the beggar remained dissatisfied and threateningly demanded more, using the most abusive terms. Yet Lü kept a smiling face and again and again apologized to him politely.
>
> Then again, Lü was looking after some sheep in the mountains. A hungry tiger came upon them, with the result that the flock scattered in all directions. Lü interposed his own person between the tiger and the terrified sheep. The tiger gave up the chase and crept away. (*Zengxian liexian zhuan* 13a)[16]

These two tests, representative of the entire series, focus on Lü's degree of attachment to material things and social customs as well as on his fear of death and his compassion for helpless creatures. The aspiring immortal must be generous with his possessions and independent of social approval, must have courage in the face of death and other threats or beguilements (one test also has Lü encounter a sensuous beauty), and must be willing to sacrifice himself on behalf of weaker beings. These moral virtues, which are not only Taoist but also Buddhist and were actively demanded in the later school of Complete Perfection,[17] are not required for their own sake or to develop a particularly moral type of person but were seen as indicative of the personal determination necessary for the utter overcoming of body and self on the path to otherworldly immortality. Moral values, although necessary in the beginning of practice as a sign of inner strength, are therefore not central to the ideal but have to be put aside and overcome together with all other aspects of ordinary life and common features of being human.

On another level, morality in the form of compassion for others forms one aspect of immortals' activities in the world. Both before and after their ascent into heaven, they appear among mortals and support them by healing diseases, exorcising demons, providing instructions for long life, or merely adding an increased sense of beauty to the world. Numerous stories document these activities, including one in the *Liexian zhuan* about a man known as Lord Horsemaster who cured animals far and wide and once even relieved a celestial dragon of an atrocious toothache; another in the *Shenxian zhuan* about the so-called Gourd Master who failed the tests of full immortality but managed to become a strong demon-dispeller on earth, reducing frightful monsters to quivering jelly wherever he went; and one tale about the wonderworker Zuo Ci, who could procure the most wonderful foodstuffs from far-off places within an instant.[18]

In their eccentric way relieving human suffering and making the world a more enjoyable place, immortals also use their magical powers to escape restraints and make fun of imperial officials, thus holding up a mirror of joy and laughter to earthlings striving so hard and taking themselves so seriously. Again the wonderworker Zuo Ci provides a good example. He has angered the ruling warlord, and guards come into the palace to throw him into prison.

> But as the guards were approaching to arrest him, Zuo Ci simply walked straight into a wall and vanished without a trace. The warlord then hired a number of men to capture him. One of these saw him in the marketplace. On the point of seizing him, suddenly all the people there were transformed into Zuo's exact likeness. No one could tell which one was he.

> Later some of the hired men found him on the slope of Southtown Hill. Again they pursued him, and he fled among a flock of sheep, turning into an animal himself. . . . Suddenly one old ram bent its forelegs, stood upright like a human being, and said in a human voice: "What a fluster you are in!"
>
> "There!" the men cried excitedly. "That ram is the one we want!"
>
> But as they made a dash for him, the entire flock of several hundred turned into rams. They all bent their forelegs, stood upright like humans, and cried: "What a fluster you are in!"[19]

This exclamation of the magical rams sums up the relation of the immortals to the world very nicely. From the perspective of the unlimited freedom of the heavens, all worldly striving and ambitions appear as just so much nervous fluster and tension, an expenditure of energy that ultimately leads to no purpose or end. Thus immortals, like sages and perfected beyond the scope of ordinary human life, hold up a mirror to the world from the perspective of a transmoral state that is at one with heaven and earth. They illustrate how one can live with the larger universe as one's home, free from involvements, obligations, and social relationships, yet not unfriendly or harmful. Themselves part of the essential goodness of the cosmos, immortals in their turn too increase the goodness of the world but not as the sages through serious personal, political, or philosophical influence, nor as the perfected through inspiring others with their humility, simplicity, and forgetfulness. Instead, immortals are whimsical and unpredictable, appearing literally out of the blue and doing a good turn to an utterly amazed community or again rendering social institutions ineffectual and making the threatening postures of warlords and demons look ridiculous. They increase the goodness of the world by helping humanity in their eccentric way, by making people laugh at themselves and gain a healthy distance from their plight. The happiness radiating from them spreads into the world and allows people to be more whole, more cheerful, and better human beings.

Not only a mythical ideal represented in fanciful stories of old, in the late middle ages the ideal of immortality was institutionalized in the Taoist religion, and practitioners came to temples and monasteries to undergo a regimen of both physical and spiritual practices that would turn them into immortals. Their goal was to gain first mystical oneness in a state of utter forgetfulness on earth and eventually ascend to the heavens of the otherworld as celestial beings. Transformation from an ordinary mortal into a wondrous part of the Tao was thought to occur in three major steps: a renewal of the body through the practice of gymnastics, breathing, and herbal diets; a calming of the mind through the attainment of

one-pointedness; and a complete change of one's entire existence in a process described in seven stages.

According to the latter, practitioners first find their body has grown light and their mind luminous, and they themselves are in a perpetual state of joy and exultation. Next, they begin to look youthful and begin to see the world in a new way, deep and mysterious. Third, they attain a high longevity and ecstatically travel to the far ends of the earth, divine servants at their beck and call. Fourth, they become one with pure energy and gain the magical power to appear and disappear at will. Fifth, they become pure spirit, changing in utter spontaneity, completely boundless and with the power to move mountains and oceans. Sixth, the changes become even more pervasive, and adepts are perfected beings who pervade all existence and change according to occasion. Seventh, finally, they whirl out of all to reside in the heavens next to the divine emperors at the source of the Tao.[20]

As this inside description of the transformation into an immortal shows, there is nothing moral about the process, neither in its foundations nor in its results. The change that occurs within the person, body and mind, is one from a limited, individualized entity into a boundless, cosmic part of the universal flow of the Tao. It dissolves individual consciousness to the point of complete forgetfulness and transforms the apparently solid body of the practitioner into a stream of energy that flows freely through the universe. A person like this while still alive will behave either like the perfected in an unobtrusive, gentle, and benevolent fashion, or again—if his skills include healing and the management of demons—as a shamanic healer or exorcist. In all cases he will stand aside from society and remain beyond its rules and judgments, secure in his being part of the Tao and thus able to point out the absurdities and pettiness of ordinary life. After death, or rather after ascent into the heavens, such a person will remain part of the heavenly realm of the Tao and from there come back to give help or inspiration to human beings on earth. The goodness he has found through his transformation in either case serves to make the cosmos truer and the world a better place.

Conclusion

Traditional Chinese religion, to summarize, knows three major types of mystical figures as characterized by its different historical traditions. All three have in common that they are at one with the Tao, the underlying flow of the universe, the cosmic law that creates and carries all, and as such stand beyond morality in a position that can be described as transmoral or supramoral. All characterized by their aloneness, their lack of family relationships and personal conscience, they are like the cosmos and nature and do not have a set of values that can be defined or to which they can be held. Nevertheless because the cosmos and nature both partake of the fundamental goodness of the Tao, each of these figures also in his own way contributes to the realization of goodness—and thus also moral goodness—in the world, exerting an active moral influence on the human community.

On the background of this commonality, the three figures play different roles and are described differently in the literature. The sage, to begin, transforms society through political, personal, or philosophical impact. Among the three he is the most clearly socially responsible, but he too is like heaven and earth in that he is not humane in his personal relationships but places the cosmic needs first. Also, a sage is a natural phenomenon, one cannot become one by mere practice but has to be born either with inherent sage abilities or with a strong urge for self-cultivation.

The perfected, second, realizes the pure goodness of the cosmos in the forgetfulness of his mind, the purity of his mental concentration, and the high quality of his skills in the world. He is the least socially concerned or active, typically staying aloof from society and moving along in his own pure world of the Tao. Still, anyone with a certain amount of effort can attain this mental state, and the perfected serves thus as a model or inspiration for others. A strongly social component only enters the ideal in the thought that the more people realize the mental purity of the perfected, the better society will become until it reaches the spontaneous, unknowing perfection of the Tao.

The immortal, third, is the ideal figure of religious Taoism; he has reached a celestial state that is both mental and physical after undergoing a long and hard training that completely changes his personal and bodily nature. As a result of this training he has attained magical and shamanic powers, such as healing, exorcism, multilocation, invisibility, and so on. He uses these powers to improve the world but not in a political or social way. Instead he holds up a mirror to people, showing them the futility and absurdity of their petty efforts, laughing at them but also with them and presenting them with a model of pure, unadulterated happiness and laughter.

The three different figures thus vary in their roles and relations to society—the sage is central in society, the perfected marginal, and the immortal entirely outside. Nevertheless they each have some social or moral responsibility that comes from their cosmic purity as realized in their minds and lives. The sage therefore allows people to rest with him and depend on him; he sees and hears the signs of the cosmos and makes them accessible to the human community. The perfected is moral in that he never harms any living beings but is overall gentle and mild to everyone he encounters. The immortal, finally, aside from being subjected to moral tests at the beginning of his training, serves the community by providing healing and exorcism and by showing how life can be happy and full of laughter.

Within this overall picture, certain critical questions arise about the nature and social activities of these three figures, questions that are inspired by the Western scholarly mind but that, at least to a certain extent, have also been asked by the tradition itself.

To begin again with the sage. Ideally, both in ancient Confucianism and Taoism, the sage is also the ruler and by definition a transmoral being whose acts

may appear bad by common standards but serve a higher cosmic purpose. As a sage-ruler, this figure has the closest link to the cosmic patterns and can govern the world in utter perfection. The problem arises when the ruler is not as much of a sage as he may think but is in fact a tyrant who thinks of himself as a sage and assumes that every little personal whim of his is an expression of cosmic harmony. Thus, while even great rulers typically levy taxes and corvée labor so they can undertake great construction projects to the benefit of the people, these may easily be taken too far and make the population's burden too heavy. How, then, does one know whether the ruler's demands and projects are part of cosmic goodness or part of a personality gone astray with power?

The tradition, which sees this problem clearly, answers that the cosmos itself is the guardian of its purity. In other words, if harvests are bountiful and the rains come at the right times and in the right measure, the ruler's activities are in harmony and thus cosmically good, however morally questionable they may appear. If there are earthquakes, floods, droughts, famines, and epidemics, however, heaven and earth are harmed by the ruler's activity, and we have a tyrant on our hands. The sage, if successful, thus must be humble and withdrawing, never see himself as a sage but always let the cosmos work through him. He may or may not be in a position of ruler, but wherever he is, moral rules do not apply to him, yet the overall quality of harmony in his surroundings prove him right. Someone deeming himself a sage and doing harm to his surroundings must be stopped, even to the point of revolution and rebellion against the state.

The figure of the perfected contains two problems—a personal and a social one. First, on the personal level, a human being without emotions and completely detached from his or her surroundings, is no easy man to live with by any standard but remains encapsulated in himself. The more people like that are being produced, moreover, the more sterile the society becomes, with "love" turning into a dirty word and any form of attachment, even among kin, being scorned. As a result, perfected in larger numbers would be like trees, standing next to each other and swaying similarly in the same cosmic wind but without any close contact or personal relationships.

The tradition has not seen this point all that clearly, but it has raised the problem of oblivion and forgetfulness in an active social context—in a rather humorous way. A story in the *Liezi* documents this. Here a man known as Huazi has attained a state of complete forgetfulness:

> He would receive a present in the morning and forget it by evening, give a present in the evening and forget it by morning. In the street he would forget to walk, at home he would forget to sit down. Today he would not remember yesterday, tomorrow he would not remember today. (chap. 3)[21]

His family, naturally concerned and inconvenienced by this behavior, consults with various specialists until a Confucian, a highly socially minded practitioner, manages to snap him out of it. Huazi, however, is far from pleased.

> "Formerly, when I forgot," he says, "I was boundless; I did not notice whether heaven and earth existed or not. Now suddenly I remember, and all the disasters and recoveries, gains and losses . . . of twenty or thirty years past rise up in a thousand tangled threads. . . . Shall I never again find a moment of forgetfulness?"

Aside from the personal and familial difficulties of the perfected personality, the expansion of the ideal of forgetfulness and spontaneity to wider circles of society also raises the spectre of social determinism. If everyone and everything has its particular natural place and function in the world, who is to say what this is? The prostitute in the initial story may have been meant to be a waitress by the cosmic principle, yet what if she decides after a few years of waitressing to start her own coffee shop? Although not immoral in her course of action, is she going beyond her predetermined position and thus creating disharmony?

The tradition again has seen this problem and answered it with the notion of luck: if all goes well in what she does, she is on the right track; if there are obstacles galore, she is overstepping the cosmic bounds. The real danger, however, lies not so much in her own perception of what she is or should be but in an outside restraint being put upon her, such as was in fact exercised by East Asian rulers, most notably in the *mibun* system of Tokugawa Japan, established under Confucian influence. Anyone born into a particular family or social position could, according to this system, not move from it. A carpenter's son had to be a carpenter even if his talents lay in the field of tailoring or acting. Social determinism sponsored by the belief in the original goodness of the cosmos that manifests itself in who and what people are is thus one of the dangers of this system, where the transmoral nature of the perfected can and has become socially harmful.

As regards the immortal, finally, the key problem is not so much his or her action in society but the more theoretical issue of individual will in such a celestial figure. On one hand, if anyone has become completely one with the Tao and lost his or her personal identity to the larger flow of the universe, where then should any personal intention or will come from, even the will to laugh and make fun, to leave the world or be eccentric in it? On the other hand, if there still is a personal intention in these figures, if they have a will, then why should they not have a conscience and thus a root of morality within them? This question was not seen and thus not discussed by the tradition, to whom immortals appeared like the wind and the rain, cosmic forces whose

movements one could not predict and yet which seemed to come and go with a will of their own. Like the wind and the rain, immortals have an impact on the world but are in themselves far beyond its concerns, so they seem to be laughing at the human plight, which looks miniscule and petty from their heavenly perspective.

Notes

1. *A Song for One or Two* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1982), 34.
2. The same ideal is also represented by the sage rulers Yao and Shun. For a discussion, see Julia Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56–62.
3. For a translation of the *Daode jing*, see Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 136–76. For the reference to the *Mencius*, see Fung Yu-lan and Derk Bodde, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 1:125. On Sun Zhuo, see Arthur Link and Timothy Lee, "Sun Cho's *Yü-tao-lun*: A Clarification of the Way," *Monumenta Serica* 25 (1966), 169.
4. Fung and Bodde, *A History*, 1:2.
5. Chan, *Source Book*, 86–87.
6. On sagehood in Neo-Confucianism, see Rodney L. Taylor, *The Cultivation of Selfhood as a Religious Goal in Neo-Confucianism* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978); Julia Ching, *To Accumulate Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); Wing-tsit Chan, *Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology Compiled by Chu Hsi and Lü Tsu-ch'ien* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).
7. For a discussion, see also Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship*, 214–18.
8. For a translation of the *Zhuangzi*, see Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).
9. Watson, *Complete Works*, 50–51.
10. Ibid., 205–6.
11. *Zhuangzi zhu* 4.156; 2.68; 6.231. See Livia Knaul, "The Winged Life: Kuo Hsiang's Mystical Philosophy," *Journal of Chinese Studies* 2 (1985), 30.
12. Knaul, "Winged Life," 31.
13. A description of the heavens of medieval Taoism is found in the first volume of Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme* (Paris: Publications de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient). For the mystical relevance of the perfected in the religion, see Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 108–16.
14. On the development of immortality from a belief in the soul, see Yü Ying-shih, "Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han-China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 25 (1964), 87; Wen Yiduo, *Shenhua yu shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1956), 159. The relation of the ideal to practices of aboriginal tribes is outlined in Max Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan* (Peking: Université de Paris Publications, 1953), 12–16; "Liexian zhuanyu liexian," *Zhongguo xuezhi* 5 (1969), 76. The connection with other, as well as indigenous, cultures is mentioned in Wen, *Shenhua*, 153. On the close relation between Persian culture and Chinese, see Ryōichi Hayashi, *The Silk Road and the Shōsō-in* (New York: Weatherhill, 1975).
15. Dated to the first century B.C.E. and fourth century C.E. respectively, these have been translated by Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan*, and Gertrud Güntsch, *Das Shen-hsien-chuan und das Erscheinungsbild eines Hsien* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988). An inside view of immortality practices and endeavors is found in Ge Hong's *Baopuzi* (*Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity*), translated in James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of AD 320* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966).
16. Translations of the full biography are found in Percifal Yetts, "The Eight Immortals," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1916, 794; Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 130.

17. This monastic school, which developed in the twelfth century, prohibited all possessions, sexual activities, and active social relations and had its trainees subjected to radical, often cruel or eccentric tests, including long periods of silent standing in icy weather, facing of possible death, or the eating of foul food. For a discussion, see David Hawkes, "Quanzhen Plays and Quanzhen Masters," *Bulletin d'Ecole Francaise d'Extrême Orient* 69 (1981), 160.
18. For the *Liexian zhuan* story, see Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan*, 47. The *Shenxian zhuan* tales are in Güntsch, *Das Shen-hsien-chuan*, 155, 162.
19. Cited from the version in *Soushen ji* (In Search of the Supernatural), chap. 1. See Kohn, *Taoist Experience*, 299.
20. This description follows the *Cunshen lianqi ming* (Inscription on the Preservation of Spirit and Refinement of Energy) by the seventh-century Taoist physician Sun Simiao. The stages are also cited in the *Dingguan jing* (Scripture on Concentration and Observation) as it appears in the appendix to the *Zuowang lun* (Discourse on Sitting in Oblivion) by the eighth-century Taoist patriarch Sima Chengzhen. For a translation and discussion, see Livia Kohn, *Seven Steps to the Tao: Sima Chengzhen's Zuowanglun* (St. Augustin: Steyler Verlag,Monumenta Serica Monograph XX, 1987).
21. The translation follows A.C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (London: A. Murray, 1960), 70.

PART THREE

Theoretical Reflections

CHAPTER NINE

Vital Intuitions: Henri Bergson and Mystical Ethics

by G. William Barnard

TO THOSE WITH a passing familiarity with the work of Henri Bergson, a turn-of-the-century French philosopher, it might seem that an essay dealing with the relationship between mysticism, ethics, and religion would focus primarily on Bergson's last major publication, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. In that text he articulates his provocative vision of the mystical and sociological origins of morality and religion. However, while much of the material explored in *The Two Sources* was new territory for Bergson, the striking originality of this work did not signal an abrupt change of position. Instead, *The Two Sources* emerged organically from the richness of his prior philosophical investigations, acting, in essence, as the final fruit of years of concerted, diligent inquiry into the nature of consciousness, the relationship between mind and matter, and the evolution of life. Therefore, in order to better understand Bergson's exploration of mysticism and ethics in *The Two Sources*, it is necessary first to explore the rich and fertile soil of his previous works.

The original seed of Bergson's entire corpus can be found in his first publication, *Time and Free Will*. Rooted in a profound introspective examination of the nature of consciousness (hence its original title in French: *Essai Sur Les Données Immédiates de la Conscience* [An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness]), this deliciously subversive text asks: What do we discover when we become conscious of our own consciousness?

According to Bergson, what we will find when we reflect on the nature of our consciousness is an inner life that is ceaselessly changing—an inner world in which one state of consciousness seamlessly flows into the next. For instance, at this moment, let's say that I am aware of feeling sad. But whether or not I am conscious of it, in the very next moment that feeling will have changed ever so subtly into something else. Perhaps I have shifted the position of my body or have shifted what I am seeing or hearing or thinking. All of these new experiences

in this new moment combine with the memory of the original feeling of sadness; they come together to produce a different "note" in the ongoing melody of my consciousness. As time passes, these changes in my consciousness continue to multiply. In fact, for Bergson, the passage of time *is itself* the changing of our consciousness. Ultimately, these changes, reverberating throughout my being, become so evident that I have to acknowledge that I am no longer feeling the way I once was; I am no longer "sad"; now I am, let's say, "content."

As Bergson points out, however, the need to label inner experience, to give it a clear-cut name (e.g., "sadness" and "contentment") comes with a heavy cost. Because we tacitly experience everything through language, he would say that, beneath the surface of our awareness, the prism of our linguistic structure fragments our experience, splitting the dynamic flux of our consciousness into unchanging, self-contained parts (i.e., "states" of consciousness such as "sadness" or "contentment"). Since words are separate, unchanging units ("contentment," as a word, always stays the same and is always a different word than "sadness"), we tend to assume that as time passes within us one "nugget" of consciousness (e.g., "sadness") is replaced by another "nugget" of consciousness (e.g., "contentment"), almost as if these moments of consciousness were beads of different colors lined up next to one another. This type of tacit spatial symbolism (each bead is solid, separate, measurable) makes it extremely difficult to recognize that, in reality, our feelings are continually in flux, and that while it is possible to distinguish different "tones" to our inner experience, there are, in actuality, no distinct boundaries within consciousness.

In a later text (*The Creative Mind,* a collection of Bergson's essays published in 1934), Bergson uses another metaphorical image to explain that we tend to think of our inner experience as if it were captured on a roll of movie film—essentially, turning the undivided flux of our consciousness into a linear series of static snapshots, one frozen "moment" followed by another.[1] In this "cinematographic" perspective on life, each thought, each memory, each feeling is tacitly understood to exist separately within us, each having its own discrete identity, each taking up just so much "space" within our psyche, each static snapshot lined up and unrolling on the underlying homogenous substance of the film of time.

But as Bergson points out, if we look more carefully within us, we will discover that each of the "moments" of our consciousness are not separate from one another. Instead, within the flux of our consciousness, nothing is static, no snapshots are cut off from the rest, there is simply the continuous flow of our awareness, each state of consciousness interpenetrating the others—"a spectrum of a thousand shades, with imperceptible gradations leading from one shade to another" (CM 193, *1398*).[2]

This indivisible fusion of manyness and oneness, this ongoing, dynamic, temporal flux of our consciousness, this flowing that is ever new and always unpredictable, this continual, seamless, interconnected, immeasurable, movement of

our awareness is what Bergson calls "durée," or in English, "duration." In the English language, the term "duration" is inevitably linked with notions of "endurance" and has connotations of grimly and stoically "enduring" something painful or difficult. But the term as Bergson uses it is intended to represent the temporal flux of our consciousness—a lived awareness that is "durable," that is, it persists (while always changing), it is always present (and always moving), it endures, in time, as time.[3] This duration, for Bergson, is that which we experience within ourselves through an intuitive introspective awareness—not as something that exists separate from us, but instead, as the dynamic essence of who we really are.

Unfortunately, as Bergson is so fond of pointing out, experiencing ourselves as a continuous, dynamic, interconnected, conscious flux is extremely difficult. In order to do so, we have to battle against deeply ingrained ways of understanding ourselves and our relationship to life. One of the most fundamental obstacles to introspective clarity is that we typically do not pay any attention to what takes place within us. As Bergson puts it, "we have no interest in listening to the uninterrupted humming of life's depths" (CM 176, *1384*). Instead, what matters to us is the external world that seems to surround us, a world populated with material objects (e.g., cars, trees, chairs, dogs, other humans, etc.) that seem to exist separate from one another, that seem to possess well-defined boundaries, that seem to remain relatively stable.[4]

Bergson claims that in order to survive as a species, most of our attention has focused on manipulating the external objects that seem to surround us. Inevitably, however, this practical, pragmatic mode of interaction with the external world (a mode of interaction that is greatly assisted by the structure of our language with its distinct and sharply defined words and concepts) affects the quality of our inner experience as well. Our need to portion out, measure, and dominate the external world, our tendency to see ourselves surrounded by objects that are static and external to ourselves and one another, objects that exist in a neutral, homogenous space, creates a predisposition to view our inner temporal experience through a corresponding type of spatial template. Seeing ourselves through this distorting lens, we lose touch with the "indivisible and indestructible continuity" of the "melody of our experience"; we divide this melody into distinct notes that can be set out, side by side, in a two-dimensional, paper thin existence (CM 83, *1312*). Whereas in actuality our inner world is a "melody where the past enters into the present and forms with it an undivided whole which remains undivided and even indivisible in spite of what is added at every instant," instead we experience an inner life that is tightly controlled, where every feeling has a label, and every idea is carefully weighed and considered (CM 83, *1312*). Whereas in actuality there is the seamless, dynamic onrush of our awareness in time, instead we live in a time that is measured and parceled out, split up into seconds, minutes, hours—the efflorescence of ceaseless novelty and inner continuity pulverized into units of sameness, each counted and accounted for.

Bergson stresses that understanding ourselves through the distorting funhouse mirror of our interactions with the external world leads, almost inevitably, to a specific philosophical stance: determinism. Physical determinism is a set of beliefs that argues that "the external world yields to mathematical laws"; physical determinism claims that "a superhuman intelligence which would know the position, the direction, and the speed of all the atoms and electrons of the material universe at a given moment could calculate any future state of the universe as we do in the case of an eclipse of the sun or the moon" (CM 108, *1332*).

Bergson emphasizes that if we believe that the activities of the external world are completely predetermined and if we see our inner reality as a reflection of the outer world in which our consciousness, like matter, is split up into tiny self-contained atoms, then it only makes sense to believe that our inner experience is also predetermined (especially if we think that our consciousness is reducible to the actions of physical atoms in the human organism). From this perspective, our current state of consciousness is said to be the inevitable, predictable result of the actions of prior "atoms" of consciousness (e.g., my anger is the direct and predetermined result of my prior conviction that my friend insulted me). This type of psychical determinism, in a manner similar to physical determinism, claims that a "mathematician who knew the position of the molecules or atoms of a human organism at a given moment, as well as the position and motion of all the atoms in the universe capable of influencing it, could calculate with unfailing certainty the past, present and future actions of the person to whom this organism belongs, just as one predicts an astronomical phenomenon."[5] Clearly, if consciousness is understood in this way, free will is nonexistent.

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson is willing, at least temporarily, to grant that the external world is governed by natural laws and that the behavior of inert matter may well be predetermined and predictable. But one of the primary thrusts of his analysis of the nature of our consciousness in this text is to demonstrate that philosophical attacks on free will are based on a mistaken understanding of the nature of the human psyche. If Bergson's conception of duration is an accurate account of our human consciousness, then the notion of the atomistic self (which is assumed by those who attack free will and, ironically, by many of those who support it) is undercut at its very roots. Bergson presents a number of persuasive arguments supporting the reality of free will, but each of these arguments is, in the final analysis, grounded in his claim that the nature of consciousness is fundamentally different from the nature of external reality. The external world (at least inert matter) is, to all appearances, a collection of separate, self-contained objects that are external to one another but interact with one another in pre determined, mechanical ways. Consciousness, however, is a dynamic, ever-new, ceaselessly changing, flowing temporal reality, an interconnected whole in which each "element" permeates and interpenetrates all the rest. Bergson concedes that advocates of philosophical determinism are, therefore, perhaps correct about the

activities of inert matter, but they are radically mistaken when it comes to the nature of our psyche in that its very essence is freedom and unforeseeable creativity. He does not mince words; for him, "freedom is . . . a fact, and among the facts which we observe there is none clearer" (TFW 221, *145*).

To Bergson's credit, however, while he strenuously argues for the reality of free will, he also realizes that this freedom "is not absolute . . . [rather], it admits of degrees" (TFW 166, *109*). Bergson acknowledges that a sizable amount of our behavior does seem to have a striking resemblance to the mechanical, nonconscious, repetitive activity of inert matter. In fact, according to Bergson, most of our actions are little more than automatic reactions to outer stimuli, reactions that "though conscious and even intelligent, have many points of resemblance with reflex acts" (TFW 168, *111*). When we act on the instigation of solidified and encrusted habits and ideas that have remained on the surface of our psyches, we often behave in many ways like a type of "conscious automaton" (TFW 168, *111*). As Bergson puts it, when we identify with our "superficial ego," with its clearly defined social roles, its rigidly held dogmas, its tightly controlled postures, "we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost . . . we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we 'are acted' rather than act ourselves" (TFW 125, 231; *83*, *151*).

Nonetheless, according to Bergson, we do have the capacity to act differently. We can push aside the "independent growths" that "form and float" on the surface of our psyche "like dead leaves on the water of a pond" (TFW 166, 135; *110*, *90*); we can turn within ourselves and melt the "clear-cut crystals" of the "ideas which we receive ready made, and which remain in us without ever being properly assimilated" (CM 192, *1397*; TFW 135–36, *90*). If we accomplish this task through an intensive introspective effort, it then becomes possible to discover deep within our psyche that aspect of our being which is "the most uniformly, the most constantly and durably" ourselves, that "continuity of flow comparable to no flowing" we have ever seen; we can once again "get back into pure duration" and thereby "recover possession" of ourselves (CM 192, *1397*; TFW 232, *151*).

According to Bergson, actions that spring forth from this fluid, ever creative, "deep-seated self" are indeed truly free; unfortunately, we rarely act from our depths in such a way that our whole personality vibrates (TFW 125, *83*). Instead, we prefer to relinquish our freedom, even in moments of crisis. We listen to the advice of others, we consult the rulebooks, we write down lists of pros and cons, we seek the approval of others, we cling to old patterns of behavior that worked in the past, we struggle to stay safely within our comfort zone. Much of the time this strategy works. We have learned how to live our lives on automatic pilot, how to avoid our depths. Fortunately, however, there are also moments in our lives in which something different takes place—moments in which, in the struggle

to make a decision, just when we think we have made up our minds, something unexpected occurs:

> At the very minute when the act is going to be performed, *something* may revolt against it. It is the deep-seated self rushing up to the surface. It is the outer crust bursting, suddenly giving way to an irresistible thrust. Hence in the depths of the self, below this most reasonable pondering over most reasonable pieces of advice, something else was going on—a gradual heating and a sudden boiling over of feelings and ideas, not unperceived, but rather unnoticed. If we turn back to them and carefully scrutinize our memory, we shall see that we had ourselves shaped these ideas, ourselves lived these feelings, but that, through some strange reluctance to exercise our will, we had thrust them back into the darkest depths of our soul whenever they came up to the surface (TFW 169–70, *112*).

At moments such as these, it may appear as if we are acting irrationally. But Bergson claims that this is not actually the case. When this sort of unexpected decision surges up within us, when we act spontaneously, seemingly without thought (a type of action that is very different from impulsive action, which is rooted in habitual emotional/motor reactions), we may not be able to give a precise, easily articulated, and justified reason for our actions, but we are actually acting out of the depths of who we are at that moment—the dynamic sum total of our most profound convictions, feelings, and aspirations.[6] Our decision could not have been worked out in advance; it could not have been made by anyone but ourselves, by anyone except who we were at that very moment.

Bergson claims that most of us implicitly want an algorithm or formula that will automatically give us the answer as to how we should act, especially in moments of difficult decisions. We want life to be predictable; we want it to obey the comforting logic of mathematics, where if we start with an initial set of premises, then certain conclusions inevitably follow—no matter who we are or when we work on the problem. But as Bergson points out, unfortunately (or fortunately!), our personal life does not follow mathematical rules. Because human beings are constantly changing, learning, and growing, "the same reasons may dictate to different persons, or to the same person at different moments, acts profoundly different, although equally reasonable. The truth is that they are not quite the same reasons, since they are not those of the same person, nor of the same moment" (CE 7, *500*). Since life is constantly in flux, Bergson advises that we learn to know and to trust our depths, to attune ourselves to what is most deeply and fundamentally real within us: the ever flowing, ever new, yet ever connected stream of our own consciousness.

Unfortunately, in *Time and Free Will*, Bergson is less helpful than he could be as to how we can learn to act more frequently and easily from our deep-seated self and not from the superficial ego. He is clear that genuinely free actions that are attuned to the depths of our being are possible as the result of rigorous introspective work, but he does not really give us any clues as to what factors might block access to the depths of our being, how we might overcome these inner barriers, or (at least in any detail or depth) how these mental and/or emotional obstacles might distort our decision-making process. Bergson also does not explore in *Time and Free Will* the nature of the relationship between our deeper self and reality as a whole, or the ways in which it might be possible to be attuned to levels of inspiration and guidance that transcend the boundaries of our personality. But as noted below, in several later works Bergson does attempt to address some of these issues—especially when he examines the connection between morality, intuitive knowing, and mystical awareness.

A Matter of Spirit

In *Time and Free Will,* Bergson offers a forceful defense of the freedom and creativity of human consciousness. In many ways this text is his sustained argument against those thinkers who claim that our actions are, in the end, simply the predetermined result of a complicated, yet predictable, dance of electrochemical interactions. However, in his attempts to underscore the reality of free will, Bergson ends up creating a yawning chasm between matter and consciousness. According to *Time and Free Will*, matter is a collection of discrete, relatively stable objects, each of which can be measured and counted, objects that interact with one another automatically, in ways that are utterly predictable (a type of interaction that causes chemistry experiments to produce the same results every time they are performed). Consciousness, however, in Bergson's analysis, is a dynamic flux of interconnected and interpenetrating states of awareness that never repeat themselves; our consciousness is always new, always creative. The problem is, given this radical distinction between matter and consciousness, how could they possibly interact? Yet this interaction appears to be a basic and ongoing fact of experience. For instance, if I make a decision to sit down on a chair, my body responds by sitting down. How is this decision communicated if my mind is utterly different from my physical body? Bergson's next book, *Matter and Memory*, delves into this dilemma.[7]

In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson argues that we are continually juggling two basic levels of experience. On the one hand, we seem to live in a stable, objective world, a world that is shared by everyone, a world in which objects interact with one another in determined, invariable ways, according to fixed natural laws, a world that does not seem to depend upon anyone's conscious perceptions (e.g., the furniture in my study exists, regardless of whether anyone is present in the room to perceive this furniture). On the other hand, according to Bergson, another world

of experience also demands our attention. Equally present, equally real, is the world of our conscious perceptions, a level of experience in which the outer world does seem to vary, moment to moment, depending upon the subjective perspective of the individual (e.g., if I shut my eyes, the furniture in the room disappears; if I spin around, it seems to move; if I like oak furniture, then my perception comes suffused with subtle feelings of fondness, and so on). In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson attempts to reconcile these two seemingly estranged realities.

Our normal, commonsense understanding of how we come to know the objective world around us is that physical stimuli from this external world impacts our sense organs, and these organs then send signals to our brain via the nervous system. Our brain, receiving these signals, promptly translates them into our conscious perceptions. This understanding of the process of perception leads us to assume that we are, in a sense, taking photographs of the universe, using our sense organs as the camera, and developing a picture of the external world by an elaborate chemical process in the brain. The problem with this commonsense understanding, however, is that there remains a big chasm between the world of matter and consciousness itself. Our consciousness is nothing like a photograph; it is not a physical piece of paper coated with chemicals. Our consciousness is not made of matter, so how can it be the product of purely physical interactions? Bergson's solution is ingenious, if perhaps difficult at first to grasp.

Bergson begins by positing a universe that is, below the level of appearances, a pulsating, interconnected field of "images."[8] These images, according to Bergson, possess qualities that are similar to both matter and consciousness. Like matter, these images are dynamic patterns of energy, vortices of vibrations that radiate outward, contacting and affecting other complexly patterned vortices of energy. This transmission of energy-information is, moment to moment, passed on to other images, automatically, fully, without hesitation. This measurable, predictable, lawful interaction is the basis for the stable, objective world of matter, a world rooted in the dependable, repeatable patterns of cause and effect studied by the natural sciences.

Understood in this way, the universe of images acts identically to the way matter is typically thought to behave. The universe of images posited by Bergson, however, is dissimilar to our typical understanding of matter in two ways. First, this universe of images is not inherently divided into a collection of separate objects possessing clear-cut boundaries. The world of separate objects that we normally perceive is not the true nature of matter. Instead, according to Bergson, it is, like our consciousness, an interconnected, dynamic continuum of becoming, in which "numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity," travel "in every direction like shivers through an immense body" (MM 208, *343*).

The second way in which the universe of images posited by Bergson is different than our usual understanding of matter is that we normally think of matter

(e.g., a stone) as inert, or nonaware. Bergson's universe of images, however, is essentially a type of virtual consciousness.[9] He would argue that consciousness, in a latent form, is already present in the universe of images. The job of the sense organs, nervous system, and brain (which are themselves images) is not to create our conscious perceptions. Instead, perception occurs when our bodies (as well as the bodies of other organisms) receive the pulses of virtually conscious vibrations from the other images of the universe. From this infinitely complex, interpenetrating field of latent consciousness, we then select and actualize only vibrations that serve the needs of our particular organism, letting the rest of the information from the universe pass through unimpeded.

According to Bergson, our "pure perceptions" (i.e., the raw data of perception—perceptions minus most of the influence of memory) are a filtrate from the totality of the universal flux of potential consciousness in which we find ourselves. Our pure perceptions are, therefore, the result of a radical truncation, a culling process by which we ignore most of what we might potentially know. As a result, we perceive only the "external crust" or the "superficial skin" of what actually surrounds us (MM 36, *186*).[10]

However, while our pure perceptions, in relation to the universe of images, are in this way simply a small part of the greater whole, Bergson claims that they are also neither relative, nor illusory. While our pure perceptions may not reveal to us all that there is to know in the world around us, this "raw data" of perception is, nonetheless, not subjective. (As we will see below, the subjectivity of our concrete perceptions comes from the superimposition of memory onto our pure perceptions.) Our pure perceptions, according to Bergson, are not "in our heads"; they are not created by our brains. Instead, this "raw data" of our perceptions is a part and parcel of the world around us. When we see a tree, we are actually there with that tree as an objective reality in our pure perceptions. Bergson does not shy away from the implications of this unique epistemology. As he puts it, "we are really present in everything we perceive."[11] In reality, therefore, our body is not limited to the small physical organism we typically identify with (although that body always remains the vital center of our world). We also possess a massive body made up of the totality of our conscious perceptions, a body that, in a very real sense, "reaches to the stars" (TS 258, *1194*).

However, while we might, unknown to us, be part of this huge, quasi-universal body, our smaller body, the "inner and central body" remains vitally important (TS 258, *1194–95*). Without our physical body we would have no pure perceptions. Bergson stresses that our senses, nervous system, and brain do not somehow magically change inert material vibrations into consciousness. Instead, acting as a type of dynamic filter, they continually screen out the vast majority of the information we receive from the mass of potential consciousness that surrounds us in order that we might act effectively and flourish as a physical organism.

Bergson goes on to point out that it is crucial for our physical body to play this role. If we were to perceive, and consequently act upon, the world as it exists at its most basic, subatomic vibratory level, if, for example, we no longer saw an oak table as a solid structure of wood, but instead consciously perceived and responded to the flux of almost infinite energetic patterns that underlie the table, we would become incapacitated, lost in the "moving immensity" of what previously had been a motionless, rectangular solid object (CM 69, *1301*). One of the most basic functions of our physicality is, therefore, to carve out manageable islands of stability in the onrush of universal becoming by choosing to focus only on that level of experience that best serves our needs. In essence, we create our experience of the world moment by moment through the power of our choices.[12] Consequently, as Bergson notes:

> [N]othing would prevent other worlds, corresponding to another choice, from existing with [our world], in the same place and the same time: in this way twenty different broadcasting stations throw out simultaneously twenty different concerts which coexist without any one of them mingling its sounds with the music of another, each one being heard, complete and alone, in the apparatus which has chosen for its reception the wave-length of that particular station (CM 69–70, *1301–2*).

Bergson's fascinating theory of how different worlds might well exist that correspond to different levels of perception was not explicitly developed with mystical traditions in mind. Instead, Bergson was primarily interested in providing a viable explanation for psychical phenomena such as clairvoyance and telepathy. Nonetheless, this theory does have crucial implications for the genesis of mystical experience. If, as Bergson speculated, the "mechanisms" that are "expressly designed to screen" the enormous flood of information we receive from the universal flux of potentially conscious images were to "get out of order," then the "door which they kept shut" would be partially opened, thereby letting in levels of information that would normally be excluded from our more mundane awareness (TS 315, *1243*).[13]

If Bergson is correct, then this explanation of the origin of telepathic and clairvoyant knowledge might well also account for certain types of mystical experiences. If we are continually connected with the entire universe, if the apparent clear-cut separation between objects is not real, but instead is created by the filtering mechanisms of the brain, perhaps different spiritual disciplines work to open up the floodgates. Perhaps they prepare us to absorb and respond effectively to more of the universal information than we are typically capable of receiving. From this perspective, if a mystic experiences a loss of egoic boundaries and the consequent sense of merger with the surrounding universe world,

this experience would be not the deluded hallucinations of madness, but rather the result of a profound contact with a deeper, but usually unperceived, level of reality.

In addition, Bergson's claim that we filter out the vast majority of the information we receive from the universe might well account for a wide range of more prosaic levels of intuitive awareness as well. Perhaps we really do know, on some level, that someone is sexually attracted to us; perhaps we really can get an accurate sense of danger or "wrongness" from someone; perhaps our empathetic awareness of the feelings of another is not a subjective projection of our feelings onto someone else, but instead is rooted in something real, in the flow of subliminal information that we constantly receive from the universe around us, but which we, for a variety of reasons, choose to ignore.

Further, Bergson speculates that there might well be another source for intuitive, nonordinary experiences. Our brain does not just filter out the mass of information we continually receive from the universe of images around us. It also screens out the vast majority of the memories that we possess—an equally valuable function, since, according to Bergson, we have within us, on a subconscious level, memories of every moment of our life. If this enormous fund of recollections from the past were actively present in our consciousness, we would be overwhelmed and unable to function effectively. But Bergson claims that, fortunately for us, most of our memories are kept from our consciousness by the body's insistent need to give attention only to that which helps it respond to the requirements of the present. Most of our memories—at least the specific recollections we have of definite events in our past—are of no use to us and so are relegated to subconscious levels of our being.

Bergson theorizes that nonordinary experiences may take place not only when the floodgates of our personal past are opened, but also when we open ourselves to other types of mental phenomena that are also blocked from our consciousness, such as telepathic information received from others. From Bergson's perspective, the sharp divisions that seem to separate physical objects do not necessarily apply to the mind. If this is the case, then there is a good possibility that our minds extend beyond the boundaries of our physical bodies (in fact, he quite explicitly argues that our memories are not stored in our brains), and that our minds are continually blending with other minds in a reciprocal flow of mental information below the surface of our awareness. Bergson notes that "if such intercommunication exists, nature will have taken precautions to render it harmless, and most likely certain mechanisms are specially charged with the duty of throwing back, into the unconscious, images so introduced" (ME 97, *874*). Bergson goes on to suggest, however, that it is possible that certain thoughts, memories, images, or feelings from other minds might occasionally manage, for various reasons, to slip past this mechanism. If so, then these incursions might well be another, equally viable, source of telepathic and clairvoyant knowledge.

It must be noted, however, that given Bergson's understanding of the relationship between matter and consciousness, it is perhaps artificial, when we consider phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, flashes of intuition, and mystical insights, to think that they emerge out of two completely separate sources of nonordinary experiences. In reality, the "matter-like" source of subliminal information from the universe of images as well as the more explicitly "mental" source—that is, memories, thoughts, and images from other streams of consciousness—are simply two ends of a single spectrum of universal becoming. While in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson maintains a strong functional dualism between matter and consciousness, the sharp edges of that dualism increasingly soften and blur as he notes the variety of ways in which matter and consciousness (especially its primary instantiation—memory) interact and interpenetrate during every concrete moment of perception.

For Bergson, memory in its most basic form—memory that is operative in, and interwoven with, perception—is not memory as we normally understand the term. Instead, memory at its most fundamental level is simply the continuity of our consciousness; it is the automatic and ongoing connection of our past to the present. It is this type of memory that, according to Bergson, ties together the enormous quantity and range of the vibrations of matter and condenses them into the perceived moments of our consciousness. (For example, drawing upon information from the science of his time, Bergson explains that, if we perceive a pulse of red light for a single second, during that time our consciousness has condensed 400 billion vibrations of that spectrum of light.)

Bergson suggests that this most basic modality of memory is operative even below the level of our conscious sense perceptions. He points out that this level of memory, in which the past is automatically carried into the present, is present even at the vibratory level of matter itself. These vibrations are not, according to Bergson, flashes of inert, utterly predetermined energy taking place in a discrete, ceaselessly repeated present. Instead, these vibrations are, even at the atomic and molecular level, bound together by an impersonal substratum of memory, a type of protoconsciousness; they are simply a different degree or "frequency" of duration—the duration of matter.

According to Bergson, the universe as a whole consists of a wide spectrum of different levels of duration, ranging from the quasi necessity of the duration of matter, through the largely instinctive duration of various rudimentary organisms, up to the highly conscious, flexible (if at times habitual) duration of human consciousness. Bergson even speculates that it is possible, and indeed likely, that there exists a duration of consciousness with a "higher degree" of "tension" (or perhaps *at*tention?) than our own—one that is able to condense the entire history of humanity into a very short period of its own duration in the same way that we condense the "history" of the vibrations of matter into the ongoing flux of the perceptions of our conscious experience in any moment (MM 207, *342*).[14]

Bergson's own focus of attention is not always quite so speculative and cosmic in scope. His explorations of memory are often extremely prosaic and down to earth. He recognizes that the task of memory is not just to bind one moment of experience to the next by connecting the past to the present or to condense the potentially conscious vibrations of matter into our everyday conscious perceptions. Memory is also operative within us either in the form of specific recollections of past events (e.g., remembering one's first time riding a bicycle) or more frequently in the form of impersonal, bodily based distillations of past events (e.g., the set of internalized motor skills it takes to ride a bicycle well). According to Bergson, these more personal forms of memory help to create the fullness of our concrete, lived experience by interweaving themselves into each "pure perception" so seamlessly that "we are no longer able to discern what is perception and what is memory" (MM 103, *248–49*).[15] For Bergson, every moment of our experience is a fusion of perception and memory. Indeed, as he notes, it is only because memory is added to perception that the objective, externalized moments of pure perception (which actually take place "outside of us," among the objects themselves) are converted into experiences that seem to be subjective and internal; that is, it is memory that makes it appear that our experience takes place "inside our heads."

In fact, although Bergson never explicitly argues this point, even the process of pure perception itself, which theoretically takes place without the activity of memory, could never occur without the help of a highly condensed form of personal memory. As pointed out above, a pure perception occurs when, out of a universe of potentially conscious images, only a fraction—those that interest us—are selected. Could this variety of interests exist without memory? Without memory, would we be able to choose from a wide range of responses, instead of reacting automatically, as matter would, to the universal influx of information? It is memory that is the source of these choices and hence of our freedom. It is this form of memory—the digest of our past, embodied in the present, and concerned with our future—that shapes our perception of the world at its most basic level.[16]

Clearly, memory serves a far more important role in the actual moments of our experience than we often realize. According to Bergson, in the final analysis, perception is simply "an occasion for remembering" (MM *66*, *213*). A pure perception by itself is rather thin; it is simply a type of schematic outline, or sketch, which in order to be most effective, needs to be filled in with a wide range of memories. These memories—which typically are not specific memory images of past events, but rather preconscious, highly distilled internalizations of cultural and psychological patterns of belief—merge with the raw perceptual data, and by doing so, shape these perceptions, giving them order, structure, and meaning. This interpretive overlay from memory is so extensive that we end up "constantly creating or reconstructing" our present experience based on the sum total of our past (MM 103, *249*).

To illustrate the role that memory plays in our perceptions, Bergson notes that if we are in a room with someone speaking a language we do not know, for example, Italian, our ears hear the same sounds as native speakers from Italy who are also in the room. Nonetheless, our experience is quite different from that of the Italians. This is so because their past experiences of learning Italian have been condensed within their consciousness, have been compressed into a highly fluid and useful distillation of memory that can superimpose itself upon the sounds of the language being spoken, thereby enabling them to hear meaningful words and sentences, while we hear nothing but a confused mass of noise.

The memory that enables individuals who know a language to make sense of various sounds is itself a fusion of different types of memory. For instance, I have numerous specific memories of times in which I went to Spanish class in high school and did grammar and pronunciation drills. Most of my somewhat rudimentary Spanish language skills, however, are not rooted in my concrete recollections of specific times spent learning this or that Spanish phrase. Instead, when I hear certain words or sentences in that language, I simply comprehend them, almost literally in my flesh and bones. Each language drill session instilled learned patterns of behavior that have become ingrained in my bodily tone, stance, breathing, and so on. This type of memory—a highly embodied, quasi-automatic, habitual reaction to the promptings of the present moment—is very different from my mental recollections of specific moments of my past.

Bergson argues that these two types of memory (recollections and habit memory) are always actively present within us, fusing with each moment of perception. Different individuals, however, will typically respond to life's demands drawing upon different "percentages" of these two types of memory. On the one extreme, there are those people who react habitually and quasi-automatically to the perceived needs of the present instant. These individuals rarely reflect on their actions, preferring instead to parrot catch phrases and to mimic the behavior of others in their group. They act on impulse, driven by ingrained, reactive patterns of behavior that are rarely, if ever, questioned. On the other extreme, there are those individuals who are almost completely cut off from the demands of daily life and from the promptings of their body. Overly intellectual, obsessively ruminating about their past mistakes or anxiously rehearsing their future actions, they live in their "heads," trapped in a mental world, out of touch with their feelings, their bodily sensations, and the world around them.[17]

Bergson points out, however, that there are people who have been able to harmonize these two types of memories, individuals who are "well-balanced," or "nicely adapted to life" (MM 153, *294*). Reflective and self-aware, they are neither mired in habitual, rigid, unreflective patterns of behavior, nor attached to beliefs that they have not made their own. Instead, they are able to draw freely upon the wisdom of past experience and can remain fluidly responsive to the changing needs of the present.

Bergson's description of these types of quasi-ideal individuals in *Matter and Memory* are, at best, rudimentary sketches; they are skeletal outlines that are fleshed out in later works. On the whole, Bergson's focus in *Matter and Memory* is not normative—instead, it is a rigorous, densely textured, closely reasoned, complex analysis of the mind/body interaction. However, in much of the work that followed *Matter and Memory* (and indeed, in parts of *Time and Free Will* as well), the threads of Bergson's abstract philosophical analyses of the nature of consciousness and the world around us are increasingly interwoven with lyrical allusions to the transformative possibilities of human life.[18]

For example, in "The Perception of Change" (an essay published originally in 1911, now found in *Creative Mind*), we can see hints of Bergson's normative vision of humanity. In this essay, Bergson suggests that we are most completely ourselves when we recognize and joyously give ourselves to the ceaseless change that is going on both within us and around us. He claims that if we can cultivate within ourselves an ongoing experience of the flux of universal becoming, then our rigid and frozen perception of life can be melted, and in doing so, "everything comes to life around us, everything is revivified in us. A great impulse carries beings and things along. We feel ourselves uplifted, carried away, borne along by it" (CM 186, *1392*). He points out that if we can let go of our fears that we will "drown in the torrent-like flow" of the movement of life; if we can release our anxiety that the world we have so carefully constructed will disintegrate if we give up our continual, and often desperate, attempts to keep things the same; if we can soften the rigid walls of our habitual patterns of reactivity and melt the frozen labels that we superimpose upon others and ourselves; we will discover, perhaps to our surprise, that we have gained a "feeling of greater joy and strength" than we might have imagined possible (CM 177, 124; *1385*, *1344*). Bergson claims that we will feel increased joy "because the reality invented before our eyes will give each one of us, unceasingly," the joy that seemingly only privileged artists possess—the joy of seeing, beneath the apparent "fixity and monotony" of our everyday lives, the "ever-recurring novelty, the moving originality of things" (CM 124, *1344–45*) We will feel greater strength because, by attuning ourselves to the ceaseless dance of creative energy that is life itself, "we shall feel we are participating, creators of ourselves, in the great work of creation which is the origin of all things and which goes on before our eyes," becoming, therefore, conscious cocreators of our world (CM 124, *1345*).

Evolutions and Transformations

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson's best known work, which followed *Matter and Memory*, Bergson echoes this transformative understanding of our creative potential. In this text, he emphasizes that each of us are "the artisans" of our lives, in that each moment of our life "is a kind of creation," a creation that is guided and inspired by our intentions, our choices, and our actions (CE 7, *500*). Like sculptors

working with clay, we are given the raw material of heredity and the environment into which we are born, and it is our responsibility to shape what we are given into the beauty or ugliness of our character. Bergson claims that this *response-ability* (my term), this ability to respond creatively to life, is not primarily the result of conscious efforts of our will. Instead, our creative ability to shape our own character is most powerfully engendered by an intuitive alignment with the cosmic life force or *élan vital*—that vital principle "in which we participate and whose eternity is not to be an eternity of immutability, but an eternity of life" (CM 186, *1392*).

Bergson suggests that if we plunge into "the depths of our experience" and discover within ourselves the place where we feel the most fully alive, if we dive into this surging river of our conscious duration, then it is possible to align ourselves with the *élan vital*, a force that he claims is ceaselessly active within us (CE 199, *664*). For Bergson, the same vital impetus that expresses itself in the blossoms of spring, in the flight of a bird over a pond, and in the brilliant light of the sun, also courses within us, in the pumping of our blood, in the flexing of our muscles, and in the ever changing dynamic flux of our consciousness. It is via an inner alignment with this force of life itself, and not via rigid moral rectitude, that we become most fully ourselves, and consequently, are able to create an ongoing experience of joy, vitality, and creativity.[19]

Bergson emphasizes that it is not coincidental that plunging into the depths of our consciousness is a potent doorway to an ongoing contact with the cosmic force of life. For Bergson, our personal consciousness is one of the clearest mirrors of the *élan vital*.[20] He points out that both our consciousness and the *élan vital* are continually growing, both are ceaselessly changing forms, both are constantly taking on shapes that are ever new (CM 21, *1262*). This continual evolution of both the *élan vital* and our personal consciousness, this shared ability to effortlessly reshape the past into forms that could not have been predicted, this mutual temporal dynamism, indicates to Bergson that life and consciousness are not two separate substances. Instead, as he puts it, "life is connected either with consciousness or with something that resembles it" (CE 179, *647*).

The consciousness that Bergson claims is connected to the energy of life is not simply human consciousness (although that is the only consciousness of which we can be directly and immediately aware). Nor is it just the consciousness that seems to be present in different degrees within all organisms (although that is one of its primary manifestations). Instead, Bergson suggests that the level of consciousness which is connected to the *élan vital* is an "enormous field" of creative awareness that is expressed in and through all organisms, to a greater or lesser degree, depending upon the level of development of their respective nervous systems (CE 179, *647*). In the more rudimentary organisms, this creative cosmic consciousness is squeezed tightly "in a kind of vise"; but in more advanced creatures, especially in human beings, it is expressed increasingly freely and completely (CE 179, *647*).

Bergson speculates that this "consciousness, or rather supra-consciousness," is itself the ceaseless pulsation of life that surges through matter; it is the creative cosmic vitality that continuously shoots out new worlds from a dynamic center of being "like rockets in a fire-works display" (CE 261, 248; *716*, *706*). This divine center of cosmic creativity (which Bergson, in a rare use of theological language, explicitly labels as "God") is not a separate object, nor is it a being who is "already made" (CE 248, *706*). Instead, "God," seen in this light, is a "continuity of shooting out"; "God" is "unceasing life, action, freedom," and as such, is the dynamic source of continual creative activity—the same creative activity that takes the form of the ongoing flux of our consciousness, the same creative activity that can be experienced "in ourselves when we act freely" (CE 248, *706*).

According to Bergson, however, this supra-consciousness, this creative urge, has certain limitations. Not only is its creative impetus finite, but it also "cannot create absolutely, because it is confronted with matter" (CE 251, *708*). The creative freedom of life is counterbalanced, at least in our physical reality, by "matter, which is necessity itself" (CE 251, *708*). Matter and life are understood by Bergson as two inverse phases of one movement. While it is life's nature to ascend, to grow, to create, it is matter's nature to descend, to dissipate, to fragment. Life cannot evade the laws of matter, "but everything happens as if it were doing its utmost to set itself free from these laws" (CE 245, *703*). If life cannot stop matter from running down, it can at least slow down the seemingly inevitable process of dissolution brought on by matter.

Bergson depicts this dynamic creative interaction between life and matter through a vivid metaphor:

> Let us imagine a vessel full of steam at a high pressure, and here and there in its sides a crack through which the steam is escaping in a jet. The steam thrown into the air is nearly all condensed into little drops which fall back, and this condensation and this fall represent simply the loss of something, an interruption, a deficit. But a small part of the jet of steam subsists, uncondensed, for some seconds; it is making an effort to raise the drops which are falling; it succeeds at most in retarding their fall. So, from an immense reservoir of life, jets must be gushing out unceasingly, of which each, falling back, is a world. The evolution of living species within this world represents what subsists of the primitive direction of the original jet, and of an impulsion which continues itself in a direction the inverse of materiality. But let us not carry too far this comparison. It gives us but a feeble and even deceptive image of reality, for the crack, the jet of steam, the forming of the drops, are determined necessarily, whereas the creation of a world is a free act, and the life within the material world participates in this liberty. Let us think rather of an action like that of raising the arm; then let us suppose that the

> arm, left to itself, falls back, and yet there subsists in it, striving to raise it up again, something of the will that animates it. (CE 247, *705*)

Although it often appears as if Bergson believes that matter is simply a negative counterweight to the dynamism of life, in reality Bergson stresses that matter does have a positive role to play in creation. In itself, life is a dynamic mass of potential, containing a multitude of tendencies. But these tendencies can only become individuated, they can only take on definite form, through the contact of life with matter. Just as a poetic inspiration can only take a concrete form via the "materiality" of specific words and phrases, the multitude of tendencies in life can only be expressed in form (at least in our level of reality) via its contact with matter. Specifically, Bergson suggests that the current of life, in and through its interaction with matter, becomes the force that propels the evolution of all organisms, in that the ceaseless outpouring of its creative dynamism is channeled and divided into the specific concrete forms of various species.

Bergson never disputes the validity of the scientific evidence for evolution. He believes that not only is the data from paleontology very persuasive, but embryology also demonstrates how a single cell, as it develops, passes through stages that are strikingly similar to the stages postulated by the theory of evolution (e.g., the embryo of a bird at one point is almost identical to that of a reptile) (CE 23–24, *514*).[21] In a more general context, Bergson also notes that embryology shows us how complex forms are able to arise from the simplest forms. So, he concludes, why should it not be the same for the evolution of life in general?

Bergson's quarrel is not with the notion of evolution itself. Instead, Bergson opposes those "scientific" notions of evolution that would negate the creative activity of life, that would reduce evolution to a mechanistic rearrangement of material parts. *Creative Evolution* offers a sustained attack on the mechanism of neo-Darwinians (who claim that evolution is the result of the natural selection—"survival of the fittest"—of accidental variations in an organism's genetic material). *Creative Evolution* also argues against the more subtle mechanism of neo-Lamarckians (who claim that evolution takes place when the experiences of one generation are passed on genetically to later generations). His arguments are complex and intriguing, but an adequate presentation of them goes beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that Bergson presents a very strong philosophical alternative to the usual scientific understanding that the evolutionary development of life is driven by a complex series of accidents.

In *Creative Evolution* Bergson does not simply argue against mechanistic reductionism. He also opposes those more "spiritual" advocates of evolution who claim that evolution is the preordained unfolding of a master plan. (Although Bergson himself is somewhat sketchy about who falls into this category, Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo are two notable twentieth-century representatives of this perspective.) Bergson claims that seeing the world as a vast machine (mecha-

nism) or as the result of a master plan (radical finalism) are, in actuality, very similar perspectives, in that both mechanism and radical finalism have difficulty envisioning the creation of something unforeseeable, something novel. Bergson offers an alternative: evolution is "not the realization of a plan," but rather an act of creation that is "unceasingly renewed," a creation that, like the flux of our consciousness itself, can never be predicted, a creation that creates itself as it progresses, a creation in which something new is ceaselessly springing forth (CE 103, *582*).

Bergson proposes that the fundamental catalyst of this ongoing evolutionary change is not physical, but instead is psychological in nature. For Bergson, evolutionary development is linked to conscious effort—not the conscious will of the isolated individual, but the supraconscious dynamism that pervades and permeates the universe. This "*original impetus* of life," according to Bergson, is passed from generation to generation through the genetic structure (CE 87, *569*). This vital impetus, in a single, unified, and continuous movement, creates and sustains the countless different species of living beings.

Bergson asks us to envision the continuity of the movement of life via the metaphor of a person moving his or her hand from one point to another. From the perspective of an outside observer, this movement from point A to point B may seem to be infinitely divisible into potential static stopping places. Bergson argues, however, that if we look closely at this movement from point A to point B, as it is experienced by the person who is actually moving his or her hand, it is not split up into parts. Instead, it is experienced from within as an indivisible, dynamic, interconnected unity of motion. In the same way, Bergson notes that life itself, if examined from the outside, may well appear to be made up of an infinitely complex collection of static, material parts, each separate from the other. However, seen from within, life is actually an ongoing, interconnected, and simple action.

Extending the comparison of the creative activity of life to the process of moving a hand, Bergson asks us to envision this hand as invisible and moving through iron filings. As the hand progresses through the filings, they take on a variety of complex patterns. Mechanists would claim that these patterns are nothing more than the actions and reactions of the filings themselves, behaving according to predictable laws of matter. The finalists would claim that the order of the filings—the way that they are disrupted when the hand passes through them—was intelligently constructed following some sort of preordained master plan. But, as Bergson notes, "the truth is that there has been merely one indivisible act, that of the hand passing through the filings: the inexhaustible detail of the movement of the grains [i.e., the iron filings], as well as the order of their final arrangement, expresses negatively, in a way, this undivided movement" (CE 94, *576*).

Bergson claims that while the impetus of life is ceaselessly creative, it does not express the multiple potentials inherent within itself all at once. Instead, its

creativity takes place over a prolonged period of time via the evolutionary development of numerous divergent species of living beings. Bergson goes on to suggest, however, that each of these species, as a relatively stable and static creation, cannot fully express the dynamism of life. As he points out, "life in general is mobility itself; particular manifestations of life accept this mobility reluctantly, and constantly lag behind. It is always going ahead; they want to mark time" (CE 128, *603*). For Bergson, life, like a powerful gust of wind, raises species like eddies of dust that circle in upon themselves. The less these various species are able to change and progress, the less they are able to successfully embody the dynamic impetus of life.[22]

Nonetheless, according to Bergson, some species have been more successful in expressing the various potentials that life carries within itself. He argues that life, in effect, has split into three major, divergent directions in its evolutionary development: it has either retrogressed into the "torpor" of plant life or it has moved into two distinct forms within the animal kingdom—either as instinct or as intelligence. Instinct, in its turn, reaches its culmination in insects, especially in the social life of ants and bees, whereas intelligence is most fully expressed in vertebrates, especially in human beings.

Bergson notes that since the time of Aristotle, it is often assumed that the intellect is superior to instinct, that it is a later stage in a single evolutionary line of development. Not surprisingly, Bergson vehemently disagrees with this unilinear evolutionary understanding, in which intelligence is understood as a higher, purified version of instinct. What he suggests, instead, is that instinct and intelligence are equally important and complimentary manifestations of the unified impulse of life.

For the purpose of analysis, Bergson creates a clear-cut distinction between instinct and intelligence, even though he also insists that "there is no intelligence in which some traces of instinct are not to be discovered," and there is "no instinct that is not surrounded with a fringe of intelligence" (CE 136, *610*). Bergson claims that instinct, pared down to its essentials, is the ability of an animal to use parts of its body as organic tools (e.g., an unborn chick using the tip of its beak as an organic "can opener" to break out of its shell). Similarly, intelligence, at least as it is manifested in human beings, is connected essentially with the invention, fabrication, and use of artificial tools.

Bergson insists that instinct is not inferior to intelligence; in fact, it has many advantages. For instance, he notes that the organic "instrument" used by instinct "makes and repairs itself"; it combines "an infinite complexity of detail . . . with a marvelous simplicity of function"; it "does at once, when required, what it is called upon to do, without difficulty and with a perfection that is often wonderful" (CE 140, *614*). There are also limitations to instinct, however. Not only are the "instruments" of instinct highly specialized and only appropriate for specific

tasks, they are also relatively invariable. In order to modify them, the species as a whole has to be modified.

Bergson points out, in contrast, that while the tools made by the intellect are usually imperfect and are, especially in the beginning, difficult to construct and handle, they nonetheless can be adapted and modified to respond to different situations. Consequently, intelligence is much more flexible to the demands of life than instinct, in effect opening the intelligent organism to potentially unlimited growth. However, according to Bergson, the numerous advantages of intelligence over instinct only come at a later stage of evolutionary development. Initially the cumbersome artificial tools created by the intellect do not answer the needs of the moment as perfectly as the instinctive reactions of the body. Therefore, the contrast between instinct and intelligence is between two complementary phenomena: the "tools" utilized by instinct, which are amazingly and effortlessly effective but that are limited in scope and rigidly inflexible in application, as opposed to the tools created by the intellect, which are risky to use, but that can be adapted to differing circumstances and, theoretically, can be extended without limit.

In Bergson's specific discussions about instinct, he points out that it is at times difficult to tell where instinct begins and where the work of nature ends. At first glance, it might well seem as if the cells in the body, working for the good of the whole, feeding and preserving and reproducing themselves, are acting on instinct—but these actions are simply the natural functions of the life of a cell. Conversely, bees in a hive, working together for the good of the whole, make it appear that "the hive is really, and not metaphorically, a single organism, of which each bee is a cell united to the others by invisible bonds" (CE 166, *636*). The bees' instincts, in this way, can be understood as either identical to the life force that is operative in a cell or as an extension of that force. Bergson therefore is willing to conclude that "the most essential of the primary instincts are really . . . vital processes" (CE 166, *635*).

According to Bergson, the life force that is operative in instinctual behavior appears to carry with it a unique type of knowledge. He offers several fascinating examples of different species of insects that seem to possess startling, nonsensory knowledge of how to interact with the world around them. Bergson suggests since this knowledge has not been gained from the insect's prior experience, it is perhaps best understood as the result of a profound connection of the insect to the movement of life that is present within and around it. One of the most striking examples is that of the Sitaris beetle:

> This insect lays its eggs at the entrance of the underground passages dug by a kind of bee, the Anthophora. Its larva, after long waiting, springs upon the male Anthophora as it goes out of the passage, clings to it, and

> remains attached until the "nuptial flight," when it seizes the opportunity to pass from the male to the female, and quietly waits until [the female bee] lays its eggs. It then leaps on the egg, which serves as a support for it in the honey, devours the egg in a few days, and, resting on the shell [of the egg], undergoes its first metamorphosis . . . [in which it changes shape so as to be able to float on the honey and eat it for food, which in turn fuels further changes in the Sitaris, turning into a nymph, and then its final insect form.] Everything happens *as if* the larva of the Sitaris, from the moment it was hatched, knew that the male Anthophora would first emerge from the passage; that the nuptial flight would give it the means of conveying itself to the female, who would take it to a store of honey sufficient to feed it after its transformation; that, until this transformation, it could gradually eat the egg of the Anthophora, in such a way that it could at the same time feed itself, maintain itself at the surface of the honey, and also suppress the rival that otherwise would have come out of the egg. And equally all this happens *as if* the Sitaris itself knew that its larva would know all these things. (CE 146–47, *619*)

As Bergson points out, all of this instinctive activity is guided by a form of implicit knowledge. This type of knowledge does not seem to take the form of definite ideas in consciousness. Nonetheless, because the insect is able to give an immediate, visceral, and appropriate response to the necessities of the situation, the actions of the insect do imply that it has a sort of knowledge of definite things in space, without this knowledge having ever been explicitly learned.

Bergson gives several other examples of how instinctive knowledge manifests in different species of insects. For instance, certain wasps know how to paralyze their prey (spiders, beetles, caterpillars) in such a way that the victim does not die, but rather goes on living, motionless, sometimes for weeks, providing food for the wasp larvae hatched from the eggs the wasp has laid on the victim. Each type of prey has to be stung at different nerve centers, and only there, in order that the prey does not die and rot, making it inedible. As Bergson notes, "when a paralyzing wasp stings its victim on just those points where the nervous centres lie, so as to render it motionless without killing it, it acts like a learned entomologist and a skilful surgeon rolled into one" (CE 146, *619*).

As Bergson goes on to point out, however, our tendency to picture the wasp as if it were a type of primitive entomologist and surgeon is simply a reflection of our tendency to superimpose our way of knowing (intelligence) on other, more instinctive forms of knowing. We cannot help thinking that the wasp "knows the caterpillar as [we know] everything else—from the outside" (CE 173, *642*). Bergson suggests, instead, that there is an immediate experiential connection between the wasp and its victim, a connection that teaches the wasp, directly, from within, where

its victim is most vulnerable. According to Bergson, this information most likely does not come from the sensory perceptions of the wasp, but rather arises from the underlying "togetherness" of the wasp and the caterpillar, a togetherness in which these two insects have an immediate, visceral connection, a connection that is rooted not only in their common evolutionary ancestry, but also in their ongoing participation in the underlying unity of life that is flowing in and through them.

As pointed out above, Bergson goes out of his way to emphasize the complementary nature of instinct and intelligence. On the one hand, the intellect seems to have few, if any limits to its knowledge of the external world, but it cannot know something directly from within. Further, the intellect seems to have evolved in order to help us deal effectively with inert and immobile matter and, consequently, has great difficulty understanding the fluid, ever changing, interconnected nature of life. The instinct, on the other hand, seems to have an innate knowledge of the interior of an object, but the focus of its knowledge is extremely narrow. In addition, as Bergson notes:

> [I]nstinct . . . is molded on the very form of life. While intelligence treats everything mechanically, instinct proceeds, so to speak, organically. If the consciousness that slumbers in it should awake, if it were wound up into knowledge instead of being wound off into action, if we could ask and it could reply, it would give up to us the most intimate secrets of life. (CE 165, *635*)

Bergson claims that if the inner, experiential connection to life given by instinct could be expanded beyond the narrow parameters of the immediate, circumscribed needs of the present; if the slumbering consciousness present in instinct could awaken and become self-reflective; if that potential consciousness could only "expand more widely, and then dive into its own depth completely," then, according to Bergson, it would become consciously "one with the generative force of life" (CE 166, *636*). When instinctive knowledge "has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely," it is no longer simply instinct nor is it a form of intelligence (CE 176, *645*). Instead, something new has emerged as a result of this dialectical union of instinct and intelligence: intuition.[23]

Bergson refuses to offer a simple definition of intuition, claiming that any definition, because it is framed in language, inevitably distorts our understanding of the true nature of intuition.[24] Intuitive knowing is a direct, concrete, experiential mode of knowing, and as such, it cannot be captured by language, which has a tendency to fragment and solidify the interconnected, fluid nature of life. Accordingly, Bergson claims that if language must still be used (as it must in any definition), it is best to describe intuition by coming at it indirectly, by offering multiple, metaphorical, complementary perspectives.

One of Bergson's favorite ways to approach intuition is to suggest that it is a direct manifestation of the original unity of life—a unity that became sundered when, eons ago, it split into instinct and intelligence. Therefore, intuition can do what neither instinct nor intelligence can do; it can take us back, with full awareness, "to the very inwardness of life" (CE 176, *645*). Understood in this way, intuition is a direct, natural, conscious experience of communion with other living beings. This communion occurs when our awareness is opened to receiving the interpenetrating, ever creative, dynamic fields of life energy that surround us—the same life energy that is present in the flowing interior of our consciousness. Therefore, the entryway into intuitive awareness is via the ongoing, often arduous attempt to become aware of the dynamism of our own consciousness; that is, it arises via a conscious immersion in the ceaseless flux of duration. Our intuitive knowledge is nurtured when we stop using our intellect to carve the flux of becoming into static objects, when we see all of life as a process of continuous change and unforseeable novelty, when we turn our awareness inward to its source—the fountain of life itself—and open ourselves to its creative energy.

Bergson's advocacy of the importance of intuitive knowing does not imply that he is anti-intellectual. He insists that in order to access intuition, we need the help of intelligence as well, since without intelligence, instinct would not have been able to expand its parameters and become self-aware. According to Bergson, although the intellect has become disconnected from the wider reality of life that is its origin, this disconnection is never complete; surrounding the intellect is a vague, nebulous, fluid awareness—our inchoate intuitive awareness of life itself (CE 193, *659*). This intuitive awareness forms an indistinct fringe around the intellectual concepts and the sensory perceptions that have been cut out from the dynamism of life. Because of the practical necessities of life, Bergson stresses that we tend to focus primarily on the "bright nucleus shining in the center" of our experience—the solid object, the clear idea; unfortunately, in doing so, we "forget that this nucleus has been formed out of the rest by condensation" (CE 46, *534*). We overlook the fact that our intellect (as well as our sensory perceptions) are simply a contracted form "of a more extensive power" (CE 46, *534*). If we hope to grasp the inner movement of life, then we must, ideally, use both forms of knowledge—our fluid intuitive sense, as well as the condensed, practical focus of our intellect.

Bergson believes that we can only come to recognize the illusory nature of our ordinary perceptions and understandings via moments of deep intuitive knowing. These intuitive insights by themselves are not sufficient, however—they then need the conceptual verification and linguistic modes of expression furnished by the intellect. As Bergson points out, just "as the diver feels out the wreck on the sea floor that the aviator has pointed out from the air, so the intellect immersed in the conceptual environment verifies from point to point, by contact, analytically, what had been the object of a synthetic and super-intellectual vision. If it

had not been for a warning from without, [i.e., from the intuition], the thought of a possible illusion would never even have occurred to it, for its illusion was a part of its nature" (CM 74, *1305*).

Bergson argues that as consciousness has evolved in human beings over the course of history, it has gradually divorced itself from its natural awareness of the interconnectedness of life and has, out of necessity, become more and more intellectual in nature. He claims that our intellect, with its ability to function effectively in a world of material objects, has been crucial for our survival as a species. But, Bergson adds, we are also bathed in the "beneficent fluid" of our tacit intuitive awareness; from our connection to this "ocean of life," we continually draw the energy and vitality we need to continue to live in this world (CE 191, *657*).[25] Our intuition, unlike the intellect, gives us direct insight into the nature of our psyche, into the reality of our free will, into our unseen connection to nature, and grants us tantalizing glimpses of the enormous potentials of development we have hidden deep within us. Therefore, according to Bergson, we need both our intellect and our intuitive knowing, but we have tended, on the whole, to neglect our intuition.

Bergson believes that in order for human beings to become "complete and perfect," we need to encourage the full unfolding of both of "these two forms of conscious activity"—noting that between this ideal humanity and our present stage of development, "we may conceive any number of possible stages, corresponding to all the degrees imaginable of intelligence and intuition" (CE 267, *721*). (Later in Bergson's thought, he explicitly claims that the mystics, saints, seers, and sages of various traditions embody these various forms of our potential conscious development.)

Bergson argues that philosophy can help us to unfold the latent potentials of our consciousness. Philosophy's task, according to Bergson, is not only intellectual. Philosophy is also called on to nurture our intuitive awareness in order to help us to "dissolve again into the Whole" (CE 191, *658*). Philosophy ideally should seize the "vague" and "discontinuous" glimmers of light shining feebly in the fringes of our inchoate intuitive awareness, in order to "sustain them, then to expand them and so unite them together" (CE 267, 268; *722*). He believes that if philosophy can help us to successfully access and generalize intuitive knowledge, then not only will we have a deeper, more accurate understanding of the nature of reality and of ourselves, but everyday life will benefit as well, "for the world into which our senses and consciousness habitually introduce us is no more than the shadow of itself: and it is as cold as death" (CM 151, *1364*). Although everything in our world "is arranged for our maximum convenience," we live artificially in a "no less artificial universe," a world in which we are cut off from the depths of ourselves and the world that surrounds us (CM 151–52, *1364–65*). Bergson thinks that his philosophical perspective can help us to throw off the culturally imposed shackles that keep us hobbled; it can allow us to "grasp ourselves afresh

as we are" and grant us a "galvanized perception" that sees the world as it really is—a dynamic, interconnected, ever new reality (CM 152, *1365*). With this new vision of ourselves and reality, "what is dormant awakens, what is dead comes to life again"; with this new vision, we can live life fully and joyfully, no longer content with the meager scraps of stale pleasures that we were previously fed, but instead, draw vitality and sustenance directly from the source of life itself within our own being (CM 152, *1365*).

However, while Bergson is optimistic about the enormous potential value of obtaining this new vision of ourselves and life, he seems to have difficulty recognizing that nurturing our intuitive awareness has rarely been the *primary* task of philosophy as it has unfolded in the West.[26] If Bergson wants philosophy to go beyond its more traditional intellectual and analytical task, then he needs to be more specific as to how it can actually help us to directly access, as well as sustain and expand, our intuitive knowledge. At best, Bergson advises us to thrust aside our intellect with an act of will, or he notes that moments of intuition can be catalyzed by an intense philosophical effort to swim upstream against the current of our habitual ways of understanding the world in order to experience directly the fluid dynamism of our consciousness. But his discussion of intuition in *Creative Evolution* (as well as in several later essays in *Creative Mind*) leave us wondering exactly how philosophy can enable us to transcend intelligence in order to contact and cultivate deeper levels of intuitive knowledge.

Only with the publication of *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* does Bergson give us alternate possibilities as to how intuitive knowledge may be deepened. Even before writing *The Two Sources*, Bergson had been intrigued with the connection between intuition and mystical awareness. He noted in an essay in *Creative Mind* that while it is difficult to say with any certainty just how far intuition goes, to tell for sure whether it "goes as far up as heaven or stops at some distance from the earth," Bergson's own conclusion was that the "metaphysical experience" engendered by intuitive knowing is "bound up with that of the great mystics" (CM 57, *1292*). In *The Two Sources* Bergson describes how various mystical traditions have historically advocated ways to transcend the intellect and access direct intuitive knowledge (even if, as noted below, he is still very spartan with the specific details as to how these mystical traditions accomplish this valuable task).[27]

Social Morality

Bergson does not begin *The Two Sources* with an exploration of the relationship between *mysticism* and morality. Instead, he begins his final book with an insightful investigation into the relationship between *society* and morality.[28] Like his famous academic counterpart (and schoolboy companion), the sociologist Emile Durkheim, Bergson was convinced that a person's moral life is deeply af-

fected by his or her social relationships.[29] For Bergson, human beings are inescapably social. Without the institutional structures of society, we would have no language, no culture, no art, and no laws. Our social life binds us to others in a way similar, but not identical, to the interconnection of cells in an organism or the instinctive communal interaction of ants in an anthill. Society gives us a shared set of unspoken, taken-for-granted assumptions of how we should move through life—how we should speak, how our bodies should move, and what goals should inspire us. Society seeps through our cells to such an extent that we carry it within us as an important aspect of our selfhood: what Bergson calls our "social ego" (TS 15, *986*).

According to Bergson, in a way that is strikingly similar to Freud's notion of the super-ego, the social ego is the preconscious, ever present internalization of social rules and norms within us. It often manifests as a vague, yet insistent sense that our behavior is being closely monitored, that our actions are being assessed by an unseen judge who encourages us to live up to our ideals, and who threatens us with punishing guilt if and when we do not toe the line.

Bergson stresses that we all carry within ourselves a tacit awareness of society's requirements. Without thinking about it, we automatically go through our daily routines: we shop, we interact with others at work, we play with our children—and every moment we submit to a multitude of social rules, simply out of habit. Conforming to this mass of internalized habits, this vast matrix of social custom, is easy. Only when we feel compelled, for various reasons, to deviate from one of these habits does an internal resistance arise—a "voice" saying "no." According to Bergson, if we should still choose to go against this voice from our social ego, if we should choose to resist this resistance, what we experience is enormous inner strain and tension as we vacillate between doing what we want and what we think society would want us to do. Only at this moment does doing our duty seem difficult.

Bergson emphasizes that, although we may like to believe that our moral decisions are based on intelligent principles that have been rationally deduced and formulated, in actuality this assumption is highly questionable. He notes:

> If desire and passion join in the discussion, if temptation is strong, if we are on the point of falling, if suddenly we recover ourselves, what was it that pulled us up? A force asserts itself which we have called the "totality of obligation": the concentrated extract, the quintessence of innumerable specific habits of obedience to the countless particular requirements of social life. This force is no one particular thing and, if it could speak (whereas it prefers to act), it would say: "You must because you must." Hence the work done by intelligence in weighing reasons, comparing maxims, going back to first principles, was to introduce

> more logical consistency into a line of conduct [that is actually driven by social obligation]. . . . Never, in our hours of temptation, should we sacrifice to the mere need of logical consistency our interest, our passion, our vanity. (TS 23, *993–94*)

Bergson argues that while each separate social obligation can be freely obeyed or disobeyed, social obligation as a whole is strikingly similar to instinctive necessity. According to Bergson, nature "intended" human beings to be social. Nature also, however, over a long period of evolutionary history, gave human beings intelligence. If we did not have intelligence, then we might indeed live together like ants in an anthill or like cells in an organism—that is, we would instinctively and automatically perform whatever actions were most conducive to the healthy operation of the group. However, because we do possess intelligence, and because as individuals we are given the power of choice, we will often choose actions based on our selfish desires and not perform those actions that would benefit society.

Bergson points out that from an evolutionary standpoint, nature has a problem: how can the necessary cohesion of human social life be maintained without undermining the valuable and intrinsically human contributions of intelligence and free will? He suggests that nature overcomes this problem by replacing the social glue of instinctive necessity with the complex system of social habits or obligations that have been internalized by each member of different human societies. No one obligation is instinctive—but the totality of obligation does act as a type of substitute for the imperative force of instinct; it is, in effect, a virtual instinct. He goes on to add that, just as the need to speak is an instinctive, natural endowment, even though there are numerous different vocabularies, in the same way the tacit system of social obligations is a requirement of nature, even if the specifics of each moral code vary from one society to the next.

Bergson claims that this quasi-instinctive matrix of social obligations operates most powerfully in the close-knit, tightly bounded world of what he terms "closed societies." Closed societies define themselves by their difference from others—their fundamental mindset is "us" against "them." Whether they are Greek city-states or African tribal communities, closed societies have a strong sense of internal cohesion and a clearly defined sense of what actions and beliefs are appropriate to those who are part of their community. These social values are typically unquestioned, especially since they are frequently understood to have been bestowed and upheld by various divine mandates.

Bergson notes that if our social life had remained frozen at the level of closed societies, then it would have been impossible for any notion of a universal code of ethics, a code that applies to all of humanity and not just to those within one's social group, to have been created. As long as we remain in the "us" versus "them" mentality, there is no possibility of ever coming, by stages, to a vision of the

innate dignity of each individual. Bergson claims that the love of humanity as a whole is qualitatively different than the love of members of one's group; as such, this shift in vision has to come about in a single leap, not by degrees. Fortunately, however, time and again, various individuals in different cultures have broken free from the limitations imposed upon them by their identification with their group and have dared to proclaim their solidarity with, and love for, humanity as a whole. Swept up by a profound insight into their connection with all of life, these ethical geniuses (inevitably "mystics" for Bergson) proclaimed a new vision—a vision of an open society that embraces all of humanity.[30]

Mystical Morality

Bergson makes the audacious suggestion that the appearance of these mystically inspired ethical geniuses can be understood as nothing less than "the creation of a new species, composed of one single individual" (TS 95, *1056*). Each of these mystics (the various prophets, sages, and seers of different religious traditions) represents a new stage of development in the evolution of life that was not possible for humanity as a whole. From this perspective, each mystic can be seen as a unique manifestation of the evolutionary dynamism of the *élan vital*.

It is important to note that in *The Two Sources* something new has emerged: love. In this text, the *élan vital* is no longer simply a quasi-biological, supraconscious, cosmic creative energy as it is in *Creative Evolution*. Instead, without argument or explanation, Bergson simply asserts that the "very essence of the creative effort" is love (TS 95, *1056*). In *The Two Sources* the *élan vital* suddenly becomes profoundly personal: it is not just the ceaseless creative dynamism of the cosmos, but is now also a supreme, divine love, a cosmic love that cares for each of us.[31]

According to Bergson, the mystics of different traditions, "the saints of Christianity . . . the sages of Greece, the prophets of Israel, the Arahants of Buddhism, and others besides," are individuals who broke through the taken-for-granted habits, obligations, and assumptions of their society, and instead, to varying degrees, managed to connect directly with the surging stream of divine love and creative power that is the *élan vital* (TS 34, *1003*). Enlivened and inspired by their mystical oneness with this universal life force, these exceptional human beings brought something new into the world, a higher type of morality, a "complete" morality (TS 33, *1003*). Through the power of their charismatic example, these prophets, saints, and seers became catalysts for social change, inspiring others with their passionate appeals for social justice and love for all.[32]

Bergson admits that "true mysticism is rare" (TS 213, *1156*). But he also insists that when true mysticism "does call, there is in the innermost being of most men the whisper of an echo" (TS 214, *1157*).[33] Because mystics are directly and powerfully connected with the source of life that flows through all things, when they share their experiences with others, those who are willing to open themselves to

the mystic's message will often feel a very deep sympathetic resonance due to their own underlying connection with that same life force. According to Bergson, mystical testimonies can in this way at times shake us free from our complacency; they can reveal the astonishing potentials for joy, love, power, and wisdom that are slumbering within us—potentials that most of us will never actually realize, at least in their fullness. But, as Bergson notes, "the spell has worked; and just as when an artist of genius has produced a work which is beyond us, the spirit of which we cannot grasp, but which makes us feel how commonplace were the things we used to admire, in the same way" once we have acknowledge the new vision of life's possibilities given to us by the mystics, our world "is no longer what it was" (TS 214, *1157*).

Bergson emphasizes that there is a difference in kind, not in degree, between mystical morality, with its vision of universal love as well as its insistence on the innate dignity of each individual, and social morality, with its insistence on loyalty to group norms.[34] For instance, mystical morality is inevitably incarnated in a specific person, who, by the example of his or her radiant and loving presence, inspires others to transform themselves and the world in which they live. Social obligation, by contrast, is almost inevitably impersonal and operates most effectively when its dictates are not questioned, when they are the taken-for-granted "way things are." Furthermore, mystical morality, in its essence, "is a forward thrust, a demand for movement; it is the very essence of mobility" (TS 58, *1024*). According to Bergson, connection with the dynamism of life leads to transformation, both individually and socially. Social morality, however, is deeply rooted in tradition and is intimately linked to a society's urge for self preservation; it is a highly conservative pressure that vehemently resists movement and change.

Finally, there is a difference in feeling and tone between these two types of morality. Bergson acknowledges that fulfilling one's social obligations can bring on a feeling of contentment, well-being, or pleasure. But he insists, in contrast, that the feeling that comes from being swept up in the enthusiastic affirmation of mystical morality is one of pure joy—the joy that comes from aligning oneself "with the generative effort of life," the joy that comes from casting off the chains of a "morality enclosed and materialized in ready-made rules," the joy that comes from a life of freedom, where the old moral code is not abandoned, but rather, is superceded and transformed "as in the case when the dynamic absorbs the static" (TS 54, 59; *1020*, *1025*).[35]

Bergson notes that, in reality, neither of these two moralities is found in a pure state. Mystical morality is always, to one degree or another, intertwined with social obligations. According to Bergson, however, it is crucial to recognize that morality, as it is lived, emerges from two distinct sources, and neither of these sources is intellectual. From Bergson's perspective, the static, quasi-instinctual morality of social obligation is infraintellectual, whereas the dynamic, inspired, and creative morality of mystical insight is supraintellectual. Bergson argues that

intellectual systems of ethics, in which moral problems are rationally analyzed, compared, and methodically solved, are not totally without value; but he goes on to claim that they are worthwhile only because they are the result of a blending of traditional, socially based moral understandings and creative, mystically inspired moral insights.[36]

Bergson stresses that it is not necessary for each of us, when making a moral decision, to start from scratch. Instead, we can, and should, draw upon the past work done by social tradition and adhere to the rules that have been laid down by society, while also benefiting from the new perspectives and the ideal patterns of life that have been revealed by mystically inspired moral geniuses. By combining these two sources of moral insight, it is possible for most of us to live a rational, self-consistent, ethical life.

The problem is that many scholars have come to believe that morality can, and should, be founded solely in logic and rational consistency, when in reality, according to Bergson, reason simply anoints the social customs (and mystical insights) that already exist.[37] Bergson points out (and you can almost hear his chuckle) that while he greatly admires the power and value of intellectual speculation, nonetheless, "when philosophers maintain that [logic alone] should be sufficient to silence selfishness and passion, they prove to us—and this is a matter for congratulation—that they have never heard the voice of the one or the other very loud within themselves" (TS 87, *1048–49*).

Therefore, according to Bergson, while at first glance it might appear that morality comes from the intellect, upon closer inspection, it is clear that morality is actually rooted in two very different sources: the pressure of social obligation and the inspired, and inspiring, appeal of mystical insights. In the end, however, even this moral dualism is undercut by Bergson, when he points out that "all morality . . . is in essence biological"; ultimately, both of these sources of morality emerge from the activity of the life force itself (TS 101, *1061*). He claims that originally the *élan vital*, as the force behind evolution, created the system of social obligations as a way to counteract the socially corrosive effects of egoism and the intellect. Later on, however, in order to "drive humanity forward" out of the stasis of closed societies, this cosmic power manifested itself once again, but this time indirectly, "through the medium of privileged persons" (i.e., the mystics) (TS 51, *1017*).[38] Working in and through these mystics, the power of life no longer had to circle around itself as in closed societies, but could once again express its creative dynamism relatively unimpeded.

According to Bergson, the moral vision that mystics receive is the result of a direct and powerful connection to the source of life itself, in which cosmic creative energy pours into them like "a stream flowing down," washing through them as they "simply open their souls to the oncoming wave" (TS 99, *1059*). Bergson claims that while mystics are initially transported by the "visions, and raptures and ecstasies" that come with this powerful experiential alignment with

the supraconscious energy of life, eventually they emerge from these transforming experiences as an active agent of the "onslaught of love" that surges through them from that divine source (TS 99, *1059*). In Bergson's eyes, each of the mystics, having "felt truth flowing into his [or her] soul from its fountainhead like an active force . . . can no more help spreading it abroad than the sun can help diffusing its light" (TS 233, *1173*). Empowered and illumined by their alignment with this divine source, the mystics effortlessly, and joyfully, offer to others a love that is "capable of transposing human life into another tone," a "mystic love of humanity" that transcends the instinctual love that individuals possess for their family, their community, or their nation (TS 99, 234; *1059*, *1174*).[39]

Bergson, waxing lyrical, proclaims that this "love which consumes" the mystic "is no longer simply the love of man for God, it is the love of God for all men. Through God, in the strength of God," the mystic "loves all mankind with a divine love" (TS 233, *1173*). According to Bergson, this divine love for all beings has been given in its entirety to exceptional human beings, who, in turn, communicate its transforming power to others. He concludes that this cosmic dynamism, this divine love, in and through the mystics, desires nothing less than "to complete the creation of the human species"; it wishes nothing less than to take humanity onto the next step of its evolutionary journey (TS 234, *1174*).[40]

Static Religion

The rhapsodic rhetoric that is characteristic of Bergson's depictions of mysticism vanishes rather suddenly when he switches his attention from mystical morality to the social roots of religious life. Once he begins his analysis of "static religion" in the latter half of *The Two Sources*, the impassioned, evocative prose that he seems to think goes hand in hand with an adequate description of mysticism is replaced, somewhat abruptly, with the muted, carefully reasoned arguments of the social scientist and philosopher.

At this point in the text, Bergson attempts, once again, to unveil a previously unseen duality. As was the case with his investigation of the two sources of morality, Bergson is convinced that religion as well has two separate, if interrelated, sources: social necessity and mystical intuitions. His investigation of "static religion," therefore, is in many ways simply a reflective double of his previous analysis of social morality.

At times, Bergson even explicitly connects static religion and social morality. For instance, at one point he claims that static religion is a form of religious life that legitimates and underscores existing social norms with the threats of divine punishments and the enticements of divine rewards (TS 98, *1058*). He argues that, as such, static religion arose hand in hand with social morality. In the same way that the nexus of social obligations acts as a type of virtual or substitute instinct to maintain the integrity of human societies, an integrity that is disturbed by the intelligent, free activity of individuals, static religion also seeks to

guard the social status quo with its religious rituals and beliefs, both of which are seemingly given divine sanction via powerful religious experiences.

Bergson insists, however, that the religious experiences at the heart of static religion do not emerge out of any authentic contact with a transnatural reality. Instead, he claims that these experiences are the result of the biologically based "myth-making function" [*fonction fabulatrice*] of the human mind (TS 109, *1067*). According to Bergson, this myth-making ability of the human mind, like the nexus of social obligations, evolved, in lieu of instinct, as a way to address the pressing human need for social cohesion. This myth-making function "conjur[es] up . . . vivid and insistent" images that "masquerade as perception"—that is, it produces hallucinatory experiences that appear as if they are the result of genuine contact with spiritual levels of existence, but in actuality are not (TS 109, *1067*). Via these unreal, yet convincing, altered states of consciousness, the myth-making function legitimates and authorizes religious rituals and beliefs, and these beliefs and rituals, in turn, uphold existing social norms.

Bergson argues that the illusory, yet vivid, experiences produced by the myth-making ability of the human mind not only give a potent seal of approval to existing religious ideas and thus undergird the unseen, yet powerful, network of social obligations, but they also mollify the existential anxieties that inevitably arise in human beings as the result of their intellectual awareness. As Bergson notes, "man is the only animal whose actions are uncertain, who hesitates, gropes about and lays plans in the hope of success and the fear of failure. He is alone in realizing that he is subject to illness, alone in knowing that he must die" (TS 204, *1149*). Therefore, the insistent, persuasive, hallucinatory experiences produced by the myth-making function of the mind act to reassure human beings that their activities, especially in times of crisis, are aided by spiritual beings who care for their welfare (or by magical powers that can be directly felt within themselves). These quasi-religious experiences also give meaning to sickness and suffering, by making one believe that these negative events are the direct result of the actions of spiritual forces. Finally, these hallucinatory encounters soothe the apprehensions that arise with the awareness of impending death by engendering experiences of a spiritual level of existence that appears to transcend physical reality. In summation, according to Bergson, static religion, rooted in the biologically evolved myth-making function of the mind, "*is a defensive reaction of nature against what might be depressing for the individual, and dissolvent for society, in the exercise of intelligence*" (TS 205, *1150;* italics in original).[41]

Bergson's analysis of static religion, so strikingly similar to the functionalism of Bronislaw Malinowski, is illustrated profusely with examples taken from the anthropological literature of his time.[42] It is peppered with discussions on magic, taboo, mana—all drawn from his readings of accounts of "primitive" tribal religious life that were published during this time. Bergson's primary examples of static religion are drawn from accounts of oral cultures, that is, those "less advanced

societies" where "the whole of morality is custom" (TS 123, *1079*). In contrast, Bergson seems to think that the religious traditions of more "advanced" cultures, especially Christianity, are at worst, "mixed" religions, that is, he seems to think that they are a confused combination of static religion and mystical religion.

Nonetheless, even if it can be inferred from *The Two Sources* that Bergson considered Christianity an example of a "mixed" religion (a claim he seems loath to make directly), we are never left with any doubt that Bergson believes that Christian religious experiences, unlike those of primal traditions, are genuine contacts with divinity. For example, at one point Bergson goes out of his way to assure his Christian readers that the visions and religious insights that offer hope to Christians about the survival of the soul after death can be trusted, unlike the illusory experiences of "primitive cultures"; he blithely comments in a footnote that "it goes without saying that the image [generated by the myth-making function] is hallucinatory only in the shape it assumes in the eyes of primitive man" (TS 131, *1086*).

But it is not at all clear why Christianity is exempt from Bergson's critical analysis of how the myth-making function operates in religious life. Are we simply to take on faith Bergson's assumption that the profound religious experiences of Christianity (and to a certain extent, other revealed traditions) are genuine contacts with the cosmic dynamism of the universe, while the visions and beliefs of so-called primitive religions are illusory defensive reactions? By what criteria do we make this assessment? Why are shamanic journeys and visionary encounters with spirits and ancestors not equally genuine and profound mystical insights into the hidden depths of reality? Even though Bergson stresses (unlike his friend Lucien Lévy-Bruhl) that "primitive" mentality is not different in structure from that of "civilized" people (although it deals with different materials), it seems that Bergson was very much a product of his time and simply could not imagine that so-called primitive peoples might have a religious life that is as authentic, rich, and powerful as that of "more advanced" cultures (TS 103, *1062*).[43]

Bergson's attempts to apply his evolutionary understandings to cultural development are also somewhat problematic. For instance, Bergson theorizes that long ago human beings automatically tended to personify powerful natural forces, for example, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, and so on, as a way to feel that the world was not impersonal and capricious (in much the same way as, even today, a child who has bumped up against a table will get angry and shout at the table as if it were a person who had mistreated him or her).[44] According to Bergson, these somewhat rudimentary personifications of natural forces either developed over time into the full-fledged gods of ancient mythology, or becoming increasingly "impoverished," became the basis for that "impersonal force which primitive man, we are told, sees underlying all things" (TS 153, *1105*). (Again, Bergson makes it clear that apprehensions of this impersonal force, for example, mana or wakan,

by "primitive" human beings are products of the myth-making function of the mind and are not valid intuitions of the *élan vital*.)

Bergson argues that over time the gods of ancient cultures evolved into increasingly complex personalities; then, gradually, as human civilization advanced, these separate gods merged into the one god of monotheism. He notes that this process of religious development "went on until the day when the religious spirit turned from the outer to the inner, from the static to the dynamic" (TS 178–79, *1127*). Bergson stresses that this shift from a static, social religion to a dynamic, mystically based religion was a crucial moment in history. Now, at last, our ancestors could free themselves from the "imaginative representations" of static religion that had temporarily halted the forward movement of the *élan vital* (TS 179, *1127*). Now, prompted by the mystical insights of this "entirely inward" religion, humanity was able once again to "continue the vital movement" of human evolution by entering into "the stream of the creative impetus" and could at last move forward instead of ceaselessly circling in one spot as it had when it was embedded in the stagnant quagmire of static religion (TS 179, *1127*).

Mystical Religion

The implication is clear: dynamic religion, due to its mystical inspiration, is nothing less than "the very essence of religion," and did not exist, in any real way, until the advent of monotheism (TS 186, *1133*). In one fell swoop, the veracity and value of all of the countless shamanic journeys, visionary encounters, and transformative insights into the realm of the spirit that are at the heart of the oral traditions of Africa, Australia, North and South America, and Asia are automatically, and without argument, discounted by Bergson. Ironically, this is the case, even if, as I would argue, it is in these cultures, perhaps more than anywhere, that mystical awareness has been actively cultivated and highly prized. Here are cultures in which one's intuitive abilities are not negated, cultures in which one's connection to the cosmic life force is actively nurtured and developed. Here are religious traditions that would be "natural" exemplars of the very types of awareness that Bergson so prized.[45]

But Bergson simply could not see this. Either from ignorance of the spiritual depths of these traditions or from lingering unexamined racial and cultural prejudices, he could not envision the possibility that the religion of these "primitives" might be anything more than a mass of stagnant, illusory superstitions and falsehoods. Of course, tribal religions did value social stability as well as visionary dynamism. But this combination of stability and dynamism, as Bergson well knows, is present in every religious tradition, including Christianity. (For example, it would not be difficult to make a case that few religious cultures were more obsessed with social stability and more suspicious of mystical innovations than medieval Christendom.) Bergson's perspective on the two sources of religion would

have been better served if he, from the beginning, acknowledged that *all* religious traditions are a mixture of these two elements.

To be fair, Bergson does emphasize that "pure mysticism is a rare essence" that is "generally found in a diluted form"—that is, he does point out that mysticism is almost inevitably found mixed with static religion, and as such it has to be regarded "as practically inseparable" from the social and institutional underpinnings of religion (TS 213, *1156*). Furthermore, as he points out, it is not accidental that the two types of religious life come together. Mystical varieties of religion actually need static religion for their "expression and diffusion," and static religion needs the dynamism and new directions brought to it by mystical levels of awareness (TS 179, *1127*). In this way, as he notes, "mysticism and religion are mutually cause and effect, and continue to interact on one another" (TS 239, *1178*). Bergson even goes so far as to say that dynamic religion is only possible if it uses the "images and symbols supplied by the myth-making function" (TS 268, *1203*). (Bergson argues, for instance, that Christian mystics inevitably operate within Christian institutions, such as churches or monasteries, and use standard Christian terminology, even as these mystics simultaneously enliven and transform these institutions and theological perspectives.)

At other moments, Bergson also seeks to convince his readers that it is possible and valuable for philosophy to examine mysticism "unalloyed, apart from the visions, the allegories, the theological language which express it" (TS 250, *1188*).[46] It is clear that in *The Two Sources*, Bergson often attempts to do just this. For example, at times he does put to one side the Christianity of the Christian mystics so that he can study their mysticism in and of itself, free from the particularities of that tradition. Nonetheless, he admits that when he utilized this methodology in *The Two Sources*, he often "simplified a great deal"; he recognizes that when he depicted Christian mysticism in this way he acted as if "the Christian mystic, the bearer of an inner revelation, had made his appearance in a humanity utterly ignorant of such a thing" (TS 237, *1176*). In reality, as he notes, no Christian mystic operates in a cultural vacuum:

> If he had visions, these visions showed him . . . what his religion had impressed upon him in the form of ideas. His ecstasies, when they occurred, united him to a God probably greater than anything he had ever conceived, but who did nevertheless correspond to the abstract descriptions with which religion had supplied him. The question may even be asked if these abstract teachings are not at the root of mysticism, and if the latter has ever done more than go over the letter of the dogma, in order to retrace it in characters of flame. The business of the mystics would in this case be nothing but bringing to religion, in order to restore its vital heat, something of the ardour with which they were fired. (TS 237, *1176*).[47]

Bergson goes on to ask: is mysticism really just "a more fervent faith," is it nothing more than a passionate version of traditional religion, or is it the case that while mysticism assimilates what is useful from traditional religion, borrowing its theological insights, speaking its language, looking to it for support, that it also "possess[es] an original content, drawn straight from the very well-spring of religion, independent of all that religion owes to tradition, to theology, to the Churches" (TS 250, *1188*)? Not surprisingly, Bergson chooses the latter option, claiming that doctrines alone could not "give birth to the glowing enthusiasm, the illumination, the faith that moves mountains" (TS 238, *1177*). However, once a religious tradition does possess "this fierce glow," then the "molten matter" of mystical intuitions can "easily run into the mould of a doctrine, or even become that doctrine as it solidifies" (TS 238, *1177*). Therefore, according to Bergson, the typical "mixed" religion to which most people give their allegiance is simply a "crystallization . . . of what mysticism had poured, white hot, into the soul of man. Through religion all men get a little of what a few privileged souls possessed in full" (TS 238, *1177*).

Bergson insists that even though mysticism is almost always found intermixed with static religion, even though the differences between the two might seem to be "a series of transitions, and as it were, differences in degree," in reality, "there is a radical difference in nature" between the two (TS 213, *1156*). Up to a point, it would seem that Bergson's observation is valid. There does seem to be a striking difference between a religious life that is rooted in security, that is fixed in tradition, that reinforces tribalism and hatred, that is set in dogmatic certainty, and a religious life that emerges from a genuine contact with the source of life, that nurtures transformation on personal and social levels, that deepens our connection to ourselves, to others, and to the world around us. The difficulty with Bergson's point of view, however, is not only that he argues that tribal traditions are utterly static and based on defensive hallucinatory experiences, but also that he uses exclusively Christian terminology to define the ideal of "complete" or "pure" mysticism. Bergson is not coy; he openly asserts that "complete mysticism is that of the great Christian mystics" (TS 227, *1168*).[48] Any mysticism other than Christian mysticism is, by definition for Bergson, a lower stage of evolutionary development. Whereas in *Creative Evolution* he had vehemently argued that the *élan vital* is the dynamic force behind a multitude of viable and complementary evolutionary directions, in *The Two Sources* it seems that the *élan vital* has, in some ways, become much more constricted, at least when it comes to religious evolution. Here, and only here, does Bergson posit a single line of evolution, that which leads to Christian mysticism.

Bergson does give an approving, if somewhat condescending, nod in the direction of those mystical traditions that are not as "complete" as Christianity. He claims that it is not correct to disparage those less evolved religions that have not been able to embody fully the spiritual depth and power of the mystical insights they have received. He also points out that just because there are mythical

or magical elements in these non-Christian mystically based religions, this does not mean that their mystical insights are thereby made irrelevant or unimportant (TS 215, *1158*).

However, this gesture in the direction of religious openness cannot mask Bergson's facile and two-dimensional accounts of mystical traditions other than Christianity.[49] Bergson's superficial and patronizing descriptions of Greek, Hindu, and Buddhist mysticism are embarrassing to read in the early twenty-first century. For instance, when Bergson asks whether Greek philosophy attained "complete mysticism," his assessment of Plotinus leaves no doubt (TS 220, *1162*). Plotinus, like the Moses of Bergson's own Jewish tradition, was allowed "to look upon the promised land, but not to set foot upon its soil" (TS 221, *1162*). Bergson further notes that Plotinus "went as far as ecstasy, a state in which the soul feels itself, or thinks it feels itself, in the presence of God, being irradiated with His light; he did not get beyond this last stage, he did not reach the point where, as contemplation is engulfed in action, the human will becomes one with the divine will" (TS 221, *1162–63*).

Plotinus actually does fairly well in Bergson's idiosyncratic rating system, at least compared to his depiction of Hindu and Buddhist mysticism, which is replete with the standard early twentieth-century European critiques of the "hypnotic states" of yoga in which mysticism "is no more than outlined" and the depiction of *nirvāṇa* as a failed attempt to reach oneness, in which a soul stops "half-way, dangling all dizzy in the void" (TS 223, 225; *1165*, *1166*).[50] The only Eastern mysticism that meets with Bergson's approval is that which is practiced by two Hindu mystics—Ramakrishna and Vivekananda—and only then because, in Bergson's mind, their mysticism had already been beneficially influenced by Christianity and the industrialization of the West. The advent of Western modes of social organization and the contact with Christianity meant that the mysticism of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda was no longer trapped in "doctrines of renunciation or the systematic practice of ecstasy; instead of turning inwards and closing, the soul could open wide its gates to a universal love," thereby enabling their mysticism at least "to develop to its fullest extent and reach its goal" (TS 227, *1167–68*).[51]

According to Bergson, the primary distinction between Christian mysticism and the less "complete" mystical traditions of Greek philosophy, Hinduism, and Buddhism is that mystics of other traditions were satisfied with ecstasy and contemplative absorption, whereas Christian mystics (e.g., St. Paul, St. Theresa, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Francis, Joan of Arc, and others) took the next step and became active agents of transformative love.[52] Bergson admits that most Christian mystics seem to have gone through stages of mystical development that are very similar to the stages described by mystics of other traditions; but, as he puts it, "they merely passed through them" (TS 227, *1168*). Other mystics might be content with "boundless joy" or "all-absorbing ecstasy" or "enthralling rapture";

other mystics might believe that they should rest in an awareness that is "flooded with light," but not the Christian mystics (TS 230, *1170*). Bergson claims that these mystics do pass through a stage in which they rest in a contemplative absorption in God's love and presence; however, this resting is merely momentary. As Bergson notes, the Christian mystics are like a train, vibrating at the station, ready to move forward. Something within them is not yet complete. He adds that the Christian mystic is aware that there is something beyond even the most intimate union with God, a union in which the separation between the mystic and God is overcome and the soul is filled with joy, absorbed in God's presence. On some level these Christian mystics are aware that their will is still not completely united with God's will. He goes on to note that, due to this recognition, their ecstasy vanishes and is replaced by anxiety and agitation. Ultimately, this anxiety turns into despair and these mystics feel alone, desolate, suffering the "darkest night" of the soul (TS 231, *1171*).

Bergson claims, however, that in this darkest night, a "profound metamorphosis" is "going on obscurely within" the mystics' consciousness (TS 231, *1171*). Seemingly thrown away from God, it is here, ironically, that these mystics discover the final and true union, the union in which God acts in and through them. At this moment, Bergson states, the consciousness of these mystics is plunged into "a superabundance of life" (TS 232, *1172*). From now on, "there is a boundless impetus," as the mystics give themselves to "an irresistible impulse which hurls" them "into vast enterprises" and that enables them, in spite of their apparent outer weakness, to accomplish amazing feats (TS 232, *1172*). At this point in their spiritual development, these mystics are swept forward by the impetus of life, they are guided from within by "an innate knowledge, or rather an acquired ignorance," which suggests to them "the step to be taken, the decisive act, the unanswerable word" (TS 232, *1172*). These mystics, according to Bergson, put forth personal effort, but their "endurance and perseverance . . . come of themselves" (TS 232, *1172*). Within them the distinction between acting and being acted upon has disappeared; within them freedom of choice perfectly coincides with the divine will. Bergson claims that they may put forth "a vast expenditure of energy, but this energy is supplied as it is required, for the superabundance of vitality which it demands flows from a spring which is the very source of life" (TS 232, *1172*).

In Bergson's eyes, these mystics succeeded, where others did not, in establishing "a contact," a "partial coincidence, with the creative effort" of life, an effort that is "of God, if it is not God himself" (TS 220, *1162*). He claims that Christian mystics, even while remaining individuals, have transcended the "limitations imposed on the species by its material nature," and in this way, they continue and extend the creative divine activity (TS 220, *1162*). According to Bergson, "if all men, if any large number of men, could have soared as high as [these mystics], nature would not have stopped at the human species," for such indi-

viduals are more than human (TS 213, *1156*). Through their example, these mystics have "blazed a trail along which other men may pass" and as such have shown us all the potentials that lie dormant within (TS 258, *1194*). Bergson claims that, through their love and their insights, these mystics have done what others could not do—that is, they have helped to catalyze "a radical transformation of humanity" (TS 239, *1178*). By assisting in the evolutionary process, in which the divine seeks "to create creators," these mystics have helped, in their own way, to create "a divine humanity" (TS 255, 239; *1192*, *1178*). By doing so, as the final sentence of *The Two Sources* notes, they have helped to fulfill "the essential function of the universe," which is nothing less than "the making of gods" (TS 317, *1245*).[53]

What are we to make of these claims? To begin with, I think it is important to emphasize that Bergson's work in *The Two Sources* is not the best lens available for understanding the historical or cultural specificities of various mystical traditions. It is perhaps best understood as a type of mystical humanism—a modern, Western, normative philosophical contribution to our understanding of human psychological and sociological potentials. As such, I would argue that Bergson offers a needed corrective to much of the current literature on mysticism, in that for him, mysticism is not an individualistic, narcissistic, or solipsistic task, but rather a channel of divine activity in the world. In his eyes, mysticism is not associated with isolation from the world, but rather is understood as an evolutionary catalyst, as a dynamic influx of creative potential that can literally transform not only the world in which we live, but even the very constitution of the human species itself.

Nonetheless, as I mentioned, there are several problems with Bergson's understanding of mysticism. To begin with, it suffers from a lack of hardheaded scholarship into the specificity of various mystical traditions, and a seeming blindness to the potential for abuse and pathology in the mystical life. His utopian pronouncements on mystical life tend to look rather naive and simplistic when juxtaposed to the in-depth investigations of recent scholars with their thick descriptions of the mystic's cultural context and their probing, theoretically nuanced examinations of the complexities of the mystic's personality structure.[54]

Furthermore, in the light of contemporary scholarship in comparative mysticism, Bergson's claim that Christian mystics stand at the pinnacle of human evolution, since they alone have been able to incarnate divine love in the world, seems appallingly parochial. If Bergson had written *The Two Sources* today, there is no doubt that most scholars would have decisively dismissed his conclusions. Not only is it clear that there have been many activist mystics in traditions other than Christianity, but Christian mystics themselves have often been wary, at best, of social engagement. Therefore, when examined closely, Bergson's clear-cut hierarchical assessment of the transformative scope of different mystical traditions dissolves into a fluid, ever shifting spectrum of ways in which various

traditions have negotiated some workable compromise between hermitic isolation and political activism.

Nonetheless, if we can penetrate past the closed walls of Bergson's exclusive claims for the priority of Christian mysticism and open his philosophy to the equally important social and personal transformative value of a broad range of mystical (and shamanic) traditions, it is possible that his examination of the complex interrelationship between mysticism and ethics can still offer us much that is worthwhile.

For instance, Bergson claims that mystical experiences are the result of a profound intuitive merger with the cosmic force of life, a claim that grounds mysticism in a substantive, empirically evident reality—the creative force of life itself, the *élan vital*. The strength of Bergson's perspective on mystical experience is that it posits the activity of a transcultural, yet empirically accessible, source of mystical experience that can legitimately account for the numerous similarities found in various mystical narratives, while it does not deny the impact and importance of cultural and religious backgrounds in shaping the experiences of the mystic.

An important problem needs to be resolved, however, before we conclude that the *élan vital* is indeed the transnatural source of mystical experiences. Bergson stresses that the *élan vital* is ever new, constantly changing; it is the ceaseless flux of becoming. Admittedly, some mystical narratives are congruent with this understanding of the *élan vital*, for example, perceptions that all of life is interconnected; sensations of joy and energy rushing through the body; experiences of one's ongoing connection to the depths of cosmic love. But the accounts of many other mystical experiences describe something that, on the face of it, seems quite different: profound peace, supreme stillness, skylike spacious openness, changeless presence.[55] Since Bergson's theoretical connection between the *élan vital* and mystical experience is based, at least in part, on the evidence provided by the mystical experiences themselves, how do we reconcile this apparent incongruity?

I argue that Bergson's metaphysics would have to be modified and amplified in order to account for mystical experiences of peace, openness, changelessness, and presence. There needs to be a place in his metaphysics for being as well as becoming; a place for the oceanic stillness of Śiva as well as the dynamic vitality of Śakti; a place for the empty circle of the Tao as well as the constant pulsating interaction of yin and yang; a place for the abysmal depths of the Godhead as well as the creative fecundity of the Trinity.[56]

It might seem that such a theoretical addition would alter Bergson's perspective beyond recognition, or that there would be insurmountable philosophical difficulties in making such a change, but I disagree. Without going into the rigorous arguments that would be needed to support this contention, I will simply point out that it could well be merely a matter of levels: accurate descriptions of life from the perspective of duality will always include change, motion, flux. But that same reality, seen from the perspective of nonduality, need not have these

qualities. Change is only relative to the differences between separate objects. Seen from the unimaginable viewpoint of complete wholeness, where are objects? Where is change? I would argue that stillness can, and does, underlie motion. Being is always implied in becoming.

Nonetheless, if our focus remains on Bergson's philosophy itself, before any creative additions, it is important to acknowledge his attempts to use empirical evidence to justify his claims about the *élan vital* and its connection to mysticism. His argument that mystical experiences are the result of a profound immersion of an individual's consciousness with the dynamic source of life is not, at least to a large extent, based on the revelatory pronouncements or faith claims of any particular religious tradition.[57] Instead, his willingness to connect mystical experiences with the *élan vital* emerges out of four empirically grounded sources: a subtle introspective examination of the nature of our consciousness; a strikingly original and clearly reasoned explanation of the mind-body relationship; a detailed, theoretically profound understanding of the nature of matter, life, and evolution; and an original, if flawed, interpretation of various mystical narratives. Bergson's conclusions are not dictates that have been handed down from on high. Instead, they are open-ended, yet philosophically sophisticated, proposals based on the best evidence we have available in the fields of psychology, biology, neurology, and even physics—as well as his own rather limited acquaintance with mystical narratives.[58]

Organic Additions

Due to the paucity of Bergson's knowledge about different historical mystical traditions, I think it should be frankly acknowledged that his perspective on mysticism (at least until it has been updated and revised) is often not a helpful interpretive key to concrete, historically situated, mystical traditions. I would also claim, however, that his perspective on mysticism does make a valuable contribution to the contemporary normative philosophy of mysticism. What follows are my own, admittedly schematic suggestions as to how Bergson's understandings might be utilized (and amplified), to address some of the key questions raised by this mode of discourse.

For instance, Bergson's work on mysticism and ethics articulates a provocative (if at times rough-hewn) vision of what it means to be fully human. Even in his earliest work, we are given a normative understanding of human beings—one that prizes fluidity, flexibility, openness, and awareness, in all areas of one's life. To be fully human for Bergson is to be aligned with, and flowing with, the dynamic flux of our consciousness. To be fully human is to be open to, and responsive to, the pulsations of the universal life force streaming through us. From a Bergsonian perspective, it is not metaphorical to say, "she is more alive than before" or "there is a deadness about him." For Bergson, there are degrees of aliveness. The more we are connected with our depths, the more awareness that we

can bring to each moment, the more that the force of life that animates all things can move freely within us—to that extent, and that extent alone, we are fully alive, fully human.

According to Bergson, what blocks our aliveness is our entrenched tendency toward rigidity, tightness, stasis, and unconsciousness. Intellectually, we want life to be compartmentalized, we want it split up into tidy, manageable sections. Emotionally, we want our feelings and our relationships with others to be predictable and under our control. Morally, we want the rulebook; we want the recipe that tells us how to live the good life. Spiritually, we want to be given the answers by someone else; we want our path securely preordained and our beliefs set in stone.

However, from a Bergsonian perspective, there is a price we pay for this intellectual clarity, emotional control, moral righteousness, and spiritual certainty. If we continue to live our life in deeply etched ruts; if we always stay with what is safe, predictable, and manageable; if we consistently repeat familiar patterns of behavior; if we don't allow ourselves to take the risk to open ourselves to the creative vitality of life; if we remain grimly attached to habitual reactive behavior; if we don't allow ourselves to be deeply moved, then we shrivel up, we fester, we die while still living, we turn into zombies lashing out at the living or robots controlled by codes that are not our own creation.

Amplifying Bergson's argument somewhat, I would claim that we all experience this stasis, this frozenness, not only intellectually, emotionally, morally, and spiritually, but also physically. Many recent body-based, neo-Reichian (and unknowingly, neo-Bergsonian) therapists have argued, and I think plausibly, that to a greater or lesser degree our own musculature is a mirror of our psyches; it is a densely encoded record of deeply rooted patterns of resistance to change, one that offers us tangible evidence of our prior calcified and habitual patterns of reacting to the dynamic, ever new flux of life.[59] These theorists claim that, as very young children, our life force was channeled and structured; we were taught to stay put, to know our place. We learned to squash our exuberance, to set up walls between ourselves and others. As adults, this deep-seated resistance to life remains, under the surface, expressing itself as an unconscious cellular tightness, as a body gripped by fear.

Fortunately, however, these theorists also claim that we possess another type of cellular memory—the echoes of an earlier time, a time of fluidity, of connectedness, a time when we joyously responded to the life energy flowing through us relatively unimpeded. While watching infants—their aliveness, their openness, their fascination with what each new moment brings—we can perhaps remember, on some level of our being, this undefended state of awareness, this place of wide open possibilities.

Nonetheless, these theorists stress that there is a deep resistance within us to this open, undefended state of awareness. The process in which our numbness comes back to life can be painful, and very frightening. Our sense of separation

from our depths, from others, from life, is deeply embedded. We cling to what we think we are, we clutch at the calcified remnants of ancient anger, we cling to the pain of buried wounds, and we shield ourselves in layer upon layer of rigid emotional scar tissue and armoring.

But this neo-Bergsonian way of understanding ourselves does not leave us simply with descriptions of our defenses against life. It also offers hope. If we can learn how to get out of the way; if we can open ourselves to the influx of a loving, gentle, healing awareness; if we can take the risk to give ourselves fully to life, then real change is possible. Bergson claims that the natural direction of life energy is toward evolution and transformation, so we don't have to force ourselves to change. Instead, we simply have to figure out how to stop resisting, how to choose differently, in order to free up the energy of life so that it can evolve naturally and relatively effortlessly. Then, giving ourselves fully to the flowering of this universal life force within us, we can reintegrate the fragments of our selfhood back into a greater whole. Through this process of letting go into the larger life within us, we can "re-member" ourselves, we can rejoin all aspects of our self into a fluid unity, we can melt the artificial walls within us that separate ourselves from others and the rest of life.

Nonetheless, practical questions remain: How do we actually get out of the way? How can we learn to deepen our connection to life? How can we facilitate this transformative process? Bergson's work gives us a hint. If we want to increase self-awareness, if we want to nurture and amplify our intuitive sense of the movement of life, then perhaps we need to look in the direction of the mystics. Bergson himself does not go into the specifics of how we can cultivate mystical awareness within ourselves, but in the early twenty-first century, any educated Westerner has access to a vast repertoire of different spiritual disciplines: meditation and visualization techniques, chanting, fasting, prayer, mindfulness training, martial arts, dance, and so on. There are seemingly endless possibilities from which to choose and practice.[60]

I argue, however, that it is naive to think that simply practicing spiritual disciplines will automatically engender a deeper connection to life. Some of the most shut-down people on the planet are people who have been meditating rigorously, rigidly, for years.[61] Becoming free from habitual ways of seeing the world and experiencing life is not an easy task—and if we are not careful, practicing spiritual disciplines can itself become a more subtle form of enslavement. Often something else is needed as well—a willingness to do the hard, yet vital, work of healing ourselves emotionally; the willingness to uncover deeply rooted, unconscious defense systems; the willingness to peel away the masks we wear in order that we might lovingly release the decades of buried hurt, rage, and fear we carry within ourselves; the willingness to transmute those traumas from our past that continually distort our experience of ourselves and our relationship to others.

Fortunately, at least from a neo-Bergsonian perspective, this sort of in-depth emotional work is itself nurtured and facilitated by those deep moments of spiritual remembering that can come via mystical awareness. As we begin to have profound experiences of our egoic boundaries melting and merging joyously into a greater wholeness; as we begin to identify increasingly with this space of expansion, freedom, and creative aliveness, then little by little, or perhaps even via a dramatic, thoroughgoing, and long-lasting shift in awareness, we can begin to create a context in which genuine positive transformations can occur, on all levels of our being. Then increasingly we can respond, creatively and spontaneously, to what each moment of life offers us. As we are more and more connected to the free-flowing power of life, and hence to others and the depths of ourselves, we can allow ourselves to be propelled by the ongoing momentum of the cosmic ocean of becoming. Like a surfer riding a wave, our movement forward in life can then be relatively effortless—and we can discover that we do not have to work as hard as we often think to live a life that is fulfilling and joyous. Like the surfer, our forward momentum does not have to come solely from our own effort. Instead, we can be propelled through life by a great force, one that is integrally linked to the depths of our being. Our responsibility is simply to align ourselves with that cosmic, conscious power and enjoy the ride (even perhaps while we are occasionally knocked off the board). We can choose this type of life, a life of joyous responsiveness and creative vitality, instead of a life in which we fearfully struggle just to keep our heads above the water, fighting against the currents of life that buffet us from moment to moment.

Using another, more orthodox Bergsonian metaphor, I believe that it is possible, like a master jazz musician, to merge into the rhythms, melody, and harmonies of life, responding intuitively and appropriately to the needs of each moment.[62] This intuitive responsiveness does not happen overnight, or easily. When jazz musicians are "in the groove," when they are flowing with, and responding to, the creative, unstructured musical cues of the other band members, the entire process can seem magical, the correct notes emerging seemingly effortlessly at just the right moment, in just the right way. But this intuitive, free-form, flexible expressiveness is the result of years of arduous practice and study. In the same way, intuitive moral appropriateness does not happen overnight. Instead, it is the result of years of conscious spiritual cultivation; it comes from a willingness to open ourselves to our depths and the courage it takes to risk following our hearts rather than just our heads.

An intuitive ethical life is also, I contend, most successful when it is based on a firm foundation of clear-cut ethical norms and the prior cultivation of ethical virtues. As children we need moral guidelines and a precise knowledge of which actions are right and which are wrong. We also need to see adults modeling virtues so that we can embody these beneficial ways of interacting with others at an early age. Then, as we mature, we also need to try on new modes of moral life. We

need to learn how to make rational moral decisions based on articulate ethical principles. We also need to learn how to attune ourselves with a transrational mode of moral knowledge, a knowledge that comes from a profound intuitive alignment with the source of life as it expresses itself within us.

This intuitive decision making does not come easily, however. The social structures around us do not support it (since they encourage conformity, tradition, and stability). Additionally, and perhaps more crucially, this ethical openness has to fight against our own deeply embedded fear of change. A powerful part of ourselves wants to keep us confined within the familiar, yet increasingly rigid and inflexible, parameters of the moral and religious laws of our childhood. Frightened by the impulses we sense raging beneath our tightly controlled, pursed-lipped, clenched-jawed exterior, we often prefer to clamp down and to judge both ourselves and others according to calcified, preset formulas of moral righteousness, rather than risk a life where there are no secure guidelines, no clear-cut boundaries, no well-defined rules.

And, we ask ourselves, why would we want to risk this sort of intuitive ethical life? We see the examples of dubious spiritual leaders attempting to rationalize their moral failings and reprehensible conduct by just this sort of mystically based, transmoral moral authority. If these individuals with years of committed spiritual work can be so fundamentally misguided, how can the decisions we make from our connection to our fundamental self be trusted? How do we separate the impulsivity that springs from egoistic desires from the genuine spontaneity of intuitive ethical choice? I would claim that there are, as might be expected, no easy, ready-made answers to these questions. Every moral path comes with risks. They cannot be avoided, even when we attempt to do so by blindly following a preset moral code or by attempting to formulate full-proof rational ethical principles. But as Bergson realized, at least the risks that come from aligning oneself with the intuitive wisdom that emerges from the depths of the self are the risks that come from living life fully, passionately, and consciously. These are risks that are worth taking.

Notes

1. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 18. Henceforth, this book is cited parenthetically in the body of the text as "CM." In addition, although perhaps not strictly necessary since the English translations of Bergson's work were all authorized by him, for the sake of scholarly accuracy, I also cite the pages of the critical edition of Bergson's original French texts: *Oeuvres* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959). All citations from *Oeuvres* follow the English translation citation and are in italics. In the case of the above citation, the *Oeuvres* citation is (*1259–60*).
2. Here again, in this analysis, the structure of our language distorts the actual experience of our consciousness. To say that there are "states" of consciousness is to imply that each of these "states" is a separate, isolated unit of experience, and to say that there are "many" of these states is to imply that these "states" can be counted—but how do you count the subtle textures of awareness that interpenetrate each other, that have no clear-cut boundaries, that are ceaselessly changing?

3. Joseph Solomon points out that Bergson's work, which stresses the difference between the artificial, mechanical, uniform clock time and the lived experience of durée, allows us to make sense of everyone's experience that "an hour of joy is infinitely shorter than an hour of expectation." Joseph Solomon, *Bergson* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1912), 23.
4. Bergson in *Matter and Memory*, the book he wrote after *Time and Free Will*, questions whether this fragmentation of the external world is any more accurate than the fragmentation of our inner world.
5. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing Company, n.d.), 144, *95–96*. Henceforth, this book is cited parenthetically in the body of the text as TFW. In *Creative Evolution*, the book Bergson wrote after *Matter and Memory*, he also cites a well-known quote by Pierre Simon de Laplace to demonstrate this type of extreme determinism. See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1911), 38, *526–27*. Henceforth, this book is cited parenthetically in the body of the text as CE.
6. To use the term "moment" when discussing Bergson's philosophical perspective is perhaps misleading to many readers. For Bergson, there is no such thing as "the moment," if it is envisioned as an isolated and single mathematical point in time. Instead, "the moment" or the present is rooted in our entire past and is dynamically pushing toward the future. As A.A. Luce notes, for Bergson, "my present is my past on tip-toe." A.A. Luce, *Bergson's Doctrine of Intuition* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 103.
7. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1991). Henceforth, this book is cited parenthetically in the body of the text as MM. *Matter and Memory* is a masterpiece—it is a subtle, detailed, brilliantly unorthodox work. But unfortunately, in order to penetrate into the heart of this masterpiece, one must first pass through the dense, seemingly impenetrable walls of highly technical philosophical prose. It is my hope that what follows successfully "translates" this philosophical jargon into prose that is more easily grasped. For a recent, extremely detailed commentary and analysis of *Matter and Memory*, see Frédéric Worms, *Introduction à Matière et mémoire de Bergson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).
8. The term "image" (also "*image*" in French), is somewhat misleading, in that it is a visual metaphor. A perhaps more cumbersome, yet more accurate phrase would be "experience vortex."
9. See, for instance, MM 235 (*365*), where Bergson states: "The material universe itself, defined as the totality of images, is a kind of consciousness."
10. In MM 36 (*186*), Bergson notes that in order to "transform" the matterlike nature of images into conscious perceptions, we, as living beings, have to "obscure some of its aspects . . . diminish it by the greater part of itself." We do this by the "suppression" of those aspects of the image-field that do not "interest" us.
11. Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 259 (*1195*). Henceforth, this book is cited parenthetically in the body of the text as TS. This understanding, crucial to *Matter and Memory*, is retained in Bergson's later work on morality and religion. Bergson rarely abandoned or altered his previous understandings, and terse summations of early works frequently appear in the body of later works.
12. This understanding of how our choices help to create our experience of the world is strikingly similar to the philosophical perspective of William James, a close friend of Bergson. For a detailed discussion of James's position, see chapter 2 of G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). For a lengthy, if rather dated, comparison of the work of Bergson and James, see Horace Meyer Kallen, *William James and Henri Bergson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1914).
13. See also Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920), 95–96, *873–74*. Pete A.Y. Gunter, a contemporary scholar of Bergson's work, pointed out to me that "this idea of Bergson's has had an immense influence on parapsychology" (personal communication). Thanks also to Jeffrey Kripal for reminding

me of the similarity of this understanding to the theories of William Blake and Aldous Huxley.

14. This type of condensation would not include the future, since, according to Bergson, the future is not determined.
15. Here also, Bergson's understanding is similar to that of William James, who describes each moment of experience as a fusion of two types of knowledge: "knowledge by acquaintance"—the raw data of our sense experience—and "knowledge-about"—the culturally mediated, linguistic, preconscious, internalized information about that sense experience. For a fuller discussion, see chapter 2 of G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).
16. F.C.T. Moore, commenting on this aspect of Bergson's work, notes that "the 'filtering' of real properties [of the "image-field"], which constitutes pure perception, is not only a biological, but also a social phenomenon." F.C.T. Moore, Bergson: *Thinking Backwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28.
17. Bergson does not go into great detail describing the qualities these two types of individuals possess, but in my depiction, I attempt to remain faithful to the thrust of his original insights.
18. Thomas Hanna notes that Bergson carefully and deliberately cultivated his "Janus faces," that is, his ambiguous alternative between the face of "a mystic, drawing away from the natural world into the surging flux" and the face of "the avid, open-eyed student of the sciences, insatiably curious about the biological and physical structures of the natural world." Thomas Hanna, ed. *The Bergsonian Heritage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 2.
19. In *Creative Evolution* Bergson forcefully contrasts his position with other versions of vitalism. Bergson's vitalism is not "naive" vitalism—that is, a vitalism which posits a quasi-material substance (the vital fluid). Instead, Bergson's "critical" vitalism posits life as a form of energy or consciousness. This energy or consciousness is universal in scope—there are not countless different internal vital energies specific to different organisms. Tom Quirk, noting the difficulty of categorizing Bergson's thought in relation to vitalism, says that "Bergson cannot be precisely identified with the vitalists per se, and he is perhaps best described as a maverick vitalist." Tom Quirk, *Bergson and American Culture*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 42. For a detailed discussion of Bergson's version of vitalism, and how it contrasts with other vitalistic thought, see Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass, eds., *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For an intriguing, if controversial, contemporary biological discussion (and reappropriation) of vitalism, see Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past* (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 1988).
20. As Leszek Kolakowski comments, "The central idea of Bergson's cosmology is this: the Whole is of the same nature as myself. The time-generating life of the consciousness is the model for the universe." Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 70.
21. This is different than Ernest Haeckel's "biogenetic law," according to which ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, that is, the belief that stages of individual development replicate the form and order of the stages of the development of the human species. For a fascinating discussion of the influence of Haeckel on Carl Jung, as well as Bergson's influence upon Jung, see Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Pete A.Y. Gunter also explores, in more detail, the links between Bergson and Jung. See Pete A.Y. Gunter, "Bergson and Jung," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1982): 635–52.
22. In *The Two Sources* Bergson uses this understanding to point out how static, self-enclosed cultures are also less able to embody the dynamism and universality of the life-impulse. The encapsulation and inertia of each society, inevitably, according to Bergson, leads to hatred of others and ceaseless warfare.
23. Although Bergson, in some circles, is primarily famous for his work on intuition, Vladimir Jankélévitch, a friend and student of Bergson's, and one of Bergson's most astute

interpreters, notes that "l'intuition proprement dite n'apparaît guère avant l'*Évolution créatrice*." [In actuality, intuition hardly appears before *Creative Evolution*.] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 49.

24. This is not to say that he did not ever give any definitions of intuition, but rather that these definitions were always understood to be working, partial definitions. Perhaps one of the most famous of these is in page 190 (*1395*) of his essay "Introduction to Metaphysics," found in *The Creative Mind*: "We call intuition here the sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it."
25. As Marie Cariou points out, for Bergson, "l'absolu n'est pas seulement un milieu dan lequel nous déployons notre énergie creatrice; il est le centre vivant dont nous tiron cette énergie-même." [The absolute is not only a surrounding in which we express our creative energy; it is the living center from which we draw that energy itself.] Marie Cariou, *Bergson et le Fait Mystique* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1976), 97–98.
26. This is not to say that Western philosophy has not had a minority tradition that did try to advocate intuition, variously understood, for example, Plato, Plotinus, Spinoza, Whitehead. For a lucid analysis of the place of intuitive knowledge in these and other thinkers, see: K.W. Wild, *Intuition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1938). For an intriguing contrast between Bergson's understanding of intuition and that of Zen Buddhism, see Minoru Yamaguchi, *The Intuition of Zen and Bergson* (Japan: Herder Agency, 1969).
27. In footnote in TS 227 (*1168*), Bergson comments that he read M. Henri Delacroix's *Studies of the History and Psychology of Mysticism*, a work that he said "deserves to be a classic." (He wrote a brief review of Delacroix's work in 1909.) He also notes that he read several of the works of Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* and *The Mystic Way* in particular, and mentions that Underhill in *The Mystic Way* "connects certain of her views with those we expressed in *L'Evolution Créatrice*." Bergson goes on to note that in *The Two Sources*, he takes Underhill's perspectives, and then carries them further. Bergson also was deeply influenced by his reading of William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. (James's picture was on Bergson's desk during the years he was writing *The Two Sources*.) However, even though Bergson was a prolific reader, because of the paucity of his citations, it is difficult to determine the extent to which he read the primary texts of different mystical traditions.
28. *The Creative Mind* was actually published last (1934), but it is a collection of previously written essays, along with two new lengthy introductions.
29. Leszek Kolakowski notes, however, that "Durkheim is said to have been instrumental in the failure of his [Bergson's] application" [twice] "for a post at the Sorbonne." Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), vii.
30. This understanding of Bergson has striking similarities James Fowler's description of "stage six" individuals. See James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).
31. Because Bergson's methodology is so strongly empirical (in the broader sense of the word), he could have claimed that he made this change in his description of the *élan vital* based on the evidence of different mystical narratives. But he never makes this claim directly in the text, nor does he, in any rigorous way, examine any other mystical testimonies that might contradict this assumption.
32. For another important theorist who also emphasizes the critical social impact of charismatic individuals, see Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991). Weber's work is, in this area, more nuanced and sophisticated than Bergson's. Weber delineates various "ideal types" of charismatic individuals (e.g., prophets, saints), each linked to a different social and economic setting, each with a different social task to perform. Furthermore, it is clear that William James's discussion of "religious geniuses" in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* also influenced Bergson's understanding of the social impact of mystics and saints. See, for instance, page 252 (*1443*) of *The Creative Mind*, where in the article "On the Pragmatism of William James: Truth and Reality" (1911), Bergson comments on James's understanding of "mystical souls."

33. This is almost a paraphrase from William James. See Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds*, 19.
34. As Kripal and I both discuss in chapters 1 and 2, the notion of individual dignity was historically a fairly recent development. Until the last several centuries, many, if not most, mystics were apparently not that concerned with it in their writings.
35. Milec Capek notes that there is a "strange contrast between [Bergson's] criticism of the 'closed society' and of 'closed religion' in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* and his 'moral adhesion' to Catholicism several years later. Since Roman Catholicism was founded on authority and unchanging tradition, does it really approach the ideal of the 'open society' and 'dynamic religion'?" Milic Capek, "Bergson's Theory of Matter and Modern Physics," in *Bergson and the Evolution of Physics,* edited by P.A.Y. Gunter (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), 313. Capek goes on to note that all of Bergson's books "have been on the *Index* since June 1, 1914." Ibid.
36. For instance, according to Bergson, the philosophical claim "of an equal participation of all men in a higher essence" can be traced back to the "intoxicating fragrance left" by the mystical love of all humanity (TS 234, *1173*).
37. Bergson argues that moral obligation "has not come *down*, as might be imagined, from above, that is to say, from a principle from which the maxims have been rationally deduced; it has come *up* from below, I mean from that substratum" of preexisting social norms (TS 91, *1052*).
38. A.R. Lacey mentions that "there is a certain ambivalence about the *élan*" in this aspect of Bergson's work. Social morality is driven from "beneath" by an "impulsive force," whereas "open morality . . . is motivated by an attractive force" in the form of the appeal of the "charismatic figure." At times in *The Two Sources*, it can appear that Bergson has, in the end, embraced a modified type of finalism, writing as if nature had intended not only human beings, but the open society. A.R. Lacey, *Bergson* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 206. Idella J. Gallagher, taking a slightly different tack, comments that "Bergson sees man as the end and apex of the evolutionary process, not in the sense that the rest of nature is for the sake of man, or that he was prefigured in the evolutionary process, but in the sense that in him the greatest measure of freedom has been achieved." Idella J. Gallagher, *Morality in Evolution* (Holland: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 45.
39. Bergson's prose alters dramatically whenever he describes the mystical source of morality (and of religion). In these sections of *The Two Sources* we enter into a completely different rhetorical world than the technical, dense, abstract philosophical prose of *Matter and Memory*, or even the moderate, reasoned, scholarly tone of much of Bergson's other work (including much of *The Two Sources* itself). In these sections of *The Two Sources*, instead of critical analysis, we find evocative, poetic discourse; here we find Bergson proclaiming rather than arguing, seeking to stir and uplift his audience, offering them an alternative vision of life, rather than a carefully reasoned and carefully modulated academic treatise. Of course, to the ears of the modern scholar, this shift in rhetoric can be somewhat off-putting. Lacking the requisite ironic overtones, devoid of the ambiguity and skepticism that pervades much contemporary academic writing, Bergson's mystically tinged prose can often seem, at best, sentimental and antiquated, and at worst, pompous and pretentious. Many scholars, confronted with this aspect of Bergson's work, might well have an understandable, if perhaps reactive, tendency not only to ignore Bergson's contributions to a philosophy of mysticism, but also to negate even Bergson's previous, more academic, contributions. I would suggest, however, that we do ourselves a great disservice if we overly quickly discount Bergson's perspective on mysticism. Perhaps there is a place for inspired, poetic, impassioned, and evocative discourse in the academy; perhaps we need to open ourselves to alternative perspectives, even if they do not always come neatly tied in the package we have grown used to receiving.
40. In the words of Alfred Loisy, *The Two Sources* is "un poème théogonique, sotériologique, eschatologique." ["a soteriological, eschatological and theogonic poem."] Alfred Loisy, *Y a-t-il Deux Sources de la Religion et de la Morale* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1933), 16.
41. This understanding of the defensive function of static religion in many ways echoes that of Sigmund Freud. See, in particular, Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

(New York: W.W. Norton, 1961); Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961). It is clear that Bergson was aware of Freud's work. For an analysis of Bergson's interaction with psychoanalytic thought, see Marie Cariou, *Lectures Bergsoniennes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), 33–79.

42. It is difficult to determine whether Bergson read Malinowski's work, much of which was written a decade before *The Two Sources*. Bergson never cites Malinowski (as was noted above, he cites very few thinkers who have influenced his thought), but the ideas, and even the examples he uses, are almost identical. See, for instance, Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1992).
43. Pete Gunter suggested that perhaps Bergson's reluctance to acknowledge the validity of the religious experiences of oral cultures is because they are rooted in a tribal setting. Therefore, these shamanic experiences function primarily to uphold the status quo of that particular tribe, and might even be used to justify and support intra-tribal warfare (personal communication).
44. Bergson also draws upon William James's account of his experience during the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 to illustrate this point. (TS 153–56, *1105–7*). For a recent intriguing and thorough study of the role of anthropomorphism in religion, see Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
45. I do not want to romanticize these cultures—historically, they had their share of brutality, stifling traditionalism, and xenophobia. But they also had much to be valued, and this was frequently overlooked or denied by Europeans of Bergson's time.
46. I would argue that, up to a point, Bergson is correct, but only if philosophy begins with a detailed examination of specific mystical traditions, in all of their contextual richness. Then, and only then, can a worthwhile "extract" or overview of mysticism be articulated. Bergson, however, seems to think that he can skip over the hard work of getting to know the specific nuances of different mystical traditions before coming to more general philosophical conclusions.
47. At first glance, this argument appears similar to that later advanced by Steven Katz. See Steven Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). In the end, however, Bergson's perspective is closer to that which I articulate in chapter 2 of *Exploring Unseen Worlds*.
48. Ironically, *The Two Sources* has frequently by critiqued by various Christian thinkers as not Christian enough in its perspective. For an example of this type of critical appraisal, see John Joseph Kelly, *Bergson's Mysticism* (Fribourg, Switzerland: St. Paul's Press, 1954).
49. Bergson's depictions of Christianity are also rather unsophisticated, but at least Christianity stands anointed as Bergson's primary representative of mysticism's essence. Loisy's work is an excellent examination of the limitations of Bergson's critical and historical understanding of various religious traditions. Loisy, *Y a-t-il Deux Sources de la Religion et de la Morale*.
50. Bergson never discusses other mystical traditions, such as Sufism or Taoism. This is regrettable, because in many ways, Bergson's metaphysics is much more congenial with Taoism or Mahāyāna Buddhism than the Catholic Christianity that he had come to admire toward the end of his life. Also, bearing in mind that his grandfather worked closely with rabbis of several well-known Hassidic dynasties, he also never mentions—with the exception of the early prophets—Jewish mysticism. For biographical information on Bergson's life, the best source is the most recent: Philippe Soulez and Frédéric Worms, *Bergson: Biographie* (France: Flammarion, 1997).
51. Based on Kripal's essay in chapter 6, this observation by Bergson is perhaps more accurate about Vivekananda than Ramakrishna.
52. Bergson's claim that mystics are individuals who are more attuned with the cosmic source of life might be philosophically defensible, but to portray mystics as if they were inevitably whirlwinds of worldly action is historically misleading. Many Christian mystics were monks or hermits who had very little conscious engagement with worldly life, and even those who were engaged in active life in the world frequently were also maintaining an active

contemplative life as well. And, of course, dynamic action in the world was not limited to Christian mystics, as I argue in chapter 2. Ian Alexander, however, disagrees with my interpretation of Bergson's thought in this area. He claims that, for Bergson, the "religious life" is understood as "a movement of oscillation between contemplation and action." Ian Alexander, *Bergson: Philosopher of Reflection* (New York: Hillary House, 1957), 65.

53. Bergson actually says that the universe is a "machine for the making of gods"—a puzzling metaphor given his stress on the unmechanistic nature of life.
54. See, for instance, Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kālī's Child* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
55. I am not the first scholar of mysticism to make this observation. In *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill notes that Bergson, "ignoring if he does not deny the existence of . . . the still Eternity, the point of rest, finds everywhere the pulse of Time, the vast unending storm of life and love." Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: New American Library, 1974), 29.
56. Śiva and Śakti are Hindu male and female divine principles. Śiva (male) is linked with stillness, presence, being, whereas Śakti (female) is linked to dynamism, creativity, change. Yin and yang are Chinese female and male cosmic principles. Yin (female) is linked with receptivity, earth, and cold. Yang (male) is linked with activity, heaven and heat. The Tao is the all-embracing unity of the ceaseless dynamic interaction of yin and yang at every moment.
57. Bergson's empiricism, in conjunction with his stress on the value of intuitive knowing and his respect for the contributions of mystics, combine to make his philosophy a rich resource for a type of contemporary syncretic spirituality that is very prevalent in West today, a "New Age" spirituality that is suspicious of dogmatism, that values experiential religious knowledge and intuitive modes of perception, and yet also respects the value of scientific theories as well.
58. There have been several fascinating and detailed recent studies of the numerous ways in which Bergson's work anticipated, almost prophetically, much of the findings of modern science. See Milic Capek, *Bergson and Modern Physics* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, 1971); Andrew C. Papanicolaou and Pete A.Y. Gunter, eds., *Bergson and Modern Thought: Towards a Unified Science* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1987); Pete A.Y. Gunter, ed., *Bergson and the Evolution of Physics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969).
59. See, for instance, Alexander Lowen, *The Language of the Body* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); John C. Pierrakos, *Core Energetics* (Mendocino: LifeRhythm Publications, 1990); and Ron Kurtz and Hector Prestera, *The Body Reveals* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1984).
60. This is not to imply that all spiritual and psychological transformation is the automatic and inevitable result of practicing various spiritual techniques, or to claim that there is no "place" for grace or the natural unfolding of the heart.
61. Two books of essays that explore the complex interaction between psychological and spiritual transformation are Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan, eds., *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigee, 1993); and John Welwood, ed., *Awakening the Heart: East/West Approaches to Psychotherapy and the Healing Relationship* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1983).
62. For a similar perspective articulated by a practitioner and scholar of Ch'an Buddhism, see Peter D. Hershock, *Liberating Intimacy: Enlightenment and Social Virtuosity in Ch'an Buddhism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

CHAPTER TEN

Ethics and the Experience of Happiness

by Jonathan Shear

HISTORICALLY, THERE HAVE been two major approaches to problems in the field of ethics. The first emphasizes the development of individual character, focusing on what is involved, in theory and practice, in becoming a good and virtuous person. The second emphasizes development of definitions, principles, and criteria, and focuses on defining right and/or good actions, intentions, and states of affairs, and distinguishing them from bad ones. The two approaches are, of course, often intimately interrelated. Nevertheless, they are readily distinguishable in their overall emphases. The first approach dominated in classical times, as exemplified in the works of Plato and Aristotle. The second approach, for a variety of historical reasons, has dominated modern Western philosophical discussions of ethics for the past several centuries.

These modern discussions, however, have made it clear that major, seemingly insurmountable problems arise with the modern "criterial" approach to ethics. In the first place, there is little or no agreement as to what the fundamental, grounding principles of ethics ought to be, if indeed any exist at all. The proponents of the major competing ethical "schools" support very different, purportedly fundamental principles, and each school argues forcefully for the inadequacies of the principles of the others, as a glance at the work of the happiness-oriented utilitarian thinkers following Mill and the duty-oriented thinkers following Kant, for example, shows. Even if agreement as to core, foundational principles of ethics could be achieved, however, which seems highly unlikely, it appears that these principles would at best be able to serve as overall heuristics, rather than as foundations enabling us to determine, deductively and in general, the propriety of particular actions, as the followers of Kant and Mill hoped. For, as the mutually opposing critics of each of the competing theories point out, human life appears vastly too complex to be adequately evaluated by such relatively simple, discursively articulable principles.

The "character-oriented" approach dominant in classical antiquity, by contrast, historically has not been so concerned with deductive relationships between actions and choices and postulated sets of foundational criterial ethical principles. Instead, it has emphasized empirical development of what are taken to be ethically sound subjective states and objective habits and dispositions.[1] Two major components of this character-development approach can readily be distinguished, one "external" and the other "internal." The "external" component emphasizes development of objective habits and dispositions for action taken to be good, deriving its inspiration from role-models accepted as embodying and/or reflecting ideal types of individuals and patterns of actions. The "internal" component emphasizes development of the individual's inner consciousness or psyche independently of questions of outer behavior, and it takes its inspiration from experiences of the inner depths of human awareness of the sorts often associated with saints and yogis.

Both of these character-oriented approaches have been quite influential historically. The external character-orientation, which we can call the "role-model" approach, is of course the dominant one in all primitive and most traditional cultures. It finds sophisticated expression in Aristotle, for example, who took the noble Greek gentleman, with his characteristic virtues (prudence, magnanimity, friendship, etc.), as his model. And the "internal" or "state-of-being" approach was found throughout the civilizations of the ancient world and is still emphasized by many of the world's religions. This state-of-being approach finds clear expression, for example, in Plato, who emphasized internal awareness of pure Beauty and Goodness (supposedly the source of all thought, knowledge, and value) as the foundation for developing that integration of inner awareness that, on his account, is the unique prerequisite for truly reliable and truly ethical behavior.[2] And this approach is also central to the ethical traditions associated with Zen, Hinduism, and other meditation- and yoga-associated religions in the East.

Recently, in response to the work of MacIntyre and others, philosophers have again begun serious discussion of the potential implications of the role-model approach for contemporary discussions of ethics. The other major character-oriented approach, however, the state-of-being approach, has yet to enter contemporary philosophical discussions of ethics in a serious way. This chapter addresses this situation by suggesting something of what this historically important but now largely ignored approach appears able to offer modern ethical theory and practice. In particular it shows that the traditional state-of-being approach can contribute to modern ethics by (1) helping to clarify the commonsensical but philosophically problematic notion of happiness crucial to ethical theory, and (2) facilitating the overall performance of important practical duties.

LET US FIRST examine some of the experiences traditionally held central to the state-of-being approach. Two experiences in particular stand out: "pure consciousness" and "pure positive affect" or happiness. Both of these experiences lie at the heart of many of the world's mystical traditions. The first of these experiences, by all accounts, is utterly abstract. As described in various civilizations throughout history, it is a state of pure awareness, completely devoid of all determinate content whatsoever. That is, it is described as a state in which consciousness exists alone, completely by itself, with no discernable phenomenological objects or qualities in it at all. The second experience is only slightly less abstract. It has as its content only the reportedly delightful and fulfilling sensation of unbounded positive affect (variously referred to as pure happiness, bliss, joy, etc.), experienced independently of all other qualities or objects of awareness whatsoever.

Not much can be said about the internal nature of the first of these experiences, that of pure consciousness, for phenomenologically, by all reports, there is nothing there (i.e., in the experience) to talk about at all. Thus little more can be said about the experience itself other than emphasizing its lack of content, as in Taoism's mind as "burnt-out cinders";[3] Chinese Zen's mind as "reduced to impotency . . . stripped of all activities" like "a withered log, an unconscious skull, a wooden horse, a stone girl and an incense burner in a deserted temple";[4] Japanese Zen's "nothingness . . . or the void";[5] Upaniṣadic Hinduism's "unseen, incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks, unthinkable, unnamable . . ., [having] no elements . . . cannot be spoken of . . . non-dual";[6] Vedānta's "beyond all seeing, hearing, touching, smelling or tasting—beyond all thinking and beyond all feeling";[7] medieval Neoplatonic Christianity's "beyond everything that can be known by the normal processes of mind . . ., this supreme and dazzling darkness . . ., self in its naked, unmade, unbegun state";[8] and so on.

The second experience is closely related to the first. It is widely reported as experienced in close association (immediately before and/or after) the first. And, like the first, it has no objects, words, symbols, or thoughts in it. But unlike the experience of pure consciousness, the second experience does have definite content, namely the abstract but nevertheless, by all reports, profoundly fulfilling experience of ultimate positive affect. Thus, for example, in Vedānta the experience of pure bliss is said to emerge when the mind in meditation has settled within itself, beyond all determinate experience, where "It holds its individuality in the void—the abstract fullness around it." Here, "pure bliss" emerges, an "intensity of happiness beyond the superlative," where no greater happiness or gain can be conceived.[9] Or, as the *Bhagavad Gītā* puts it,

> Having established the mind in the
> Self [i.e., pure consciousness], let him not think at all.

> For supreme happiness comes to the
> yogi whose mind is deep in peace.
>
> Thus collecting himself
> the yogi . . .
>
> with ease attains contact with
> . . . infinite joy.
>
> free from craving for
> any pleasure,
>
> Having gained [that] which he counts no
> other gain as higher . . .[10]

And we find Plato, in the famous passage in the heart of the *Symposium*, describing the experience of pure, abstract, affective fulfillment as being a "wondrous vision which is the soul of the beauty" one "has toiled so long for" in all of one's other strivings (physical, emotional, aesthetic, intellectual, etc.) in life. This vision, in Plato's words, "bursts upon" one's inner awareness as a pure, unbounded experience of

> an everlasting loveliness which neither comes nor goes, which neither flowers nor fades . . . the same on every hand . . . then as now, here as there, this way as that way, the same to every worshiper as it is to every other . . . subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness . . . the same inviolable whole,

completely distinct from all other things (words, discursive knowledge, the whole objective universe, etc.).[11]

THESE TWO TYPES of experiences, (1) pure consciousness devoid of all objective content and (2) pure positive affect independent of all other objects of awareness, central to traditional state-of-being ethical analyses, are widely recognized as occurring throughout the various cultures of the world. Moreover, they have major importance independently of specifically ethical concerns, for they are generally taken to be central, if not *the* central, experiences in the literature of mysticism.[12] These experiences have accordingly been the subject of a variety of different analyses. Before turning to our central task of examination of the significance of these experiences for ethical issues, we should therefore note a con-

temporary critique of the propriety of talking about these experiences as "two types" of experience at all. Hermeneutical thinkers often object to the notion that experiences in general, and these experiences in particular, can be talked about as having any universal, culture-free content, and therefore as identifiable as the same (or same types of) experiences occurring throughout history. This is because, they argue, these experiences, like all others, have to derive their content and form from culture-bound components of our experience such as our memories, expectations, accumulations of prior experiences, concepts, symbols, rituals, and so on.[13]

It should be obvious, however, that the two experiences we have been discussing, namely, pure consciousness and pure positive affect or happiness, are independent of all such culture-bound content. Any experience properly identifiable as pure consciousness has no content identifiable in it at all, and therefore it has none of these culture-bound contents. And as we have defined it, pure positive affect, too, is nothing but a highly abstract simple feeling, experienced, as the accounts make clear, independently of all the differentiating, culture-dependent contents hermeneutical thinkers argue must constitute and differentiate all of our experiences.[14]

Indeed, the phenomenological uniqueness, and therefore culture-independence, of both these experiences would thus seem to follow immediately from their definitions. Consider first the pure consciousness experience. Logically speaking, it should be obvious that any two experiences fulfilling the identifying description would have to be phenomenologically indistinguishable. Suppose that two experiences of pure consciousness were phenomenologically different. Then at least one of them would have to have some content not in the other. But this would mean that this experience *did* have some empirical content (i.e., content that can be either present or absent in one's experience), contrary to the original supposition that both experiences were instances of pure consciousness. This straightforwardly implies that no two instances of experiences of pure consciousness could have any differentiating phenomenological content, for the simple reason that they have no empirical content in them at all.[15]

Next consider the experience of pure positive affect. If, as is often claimed, this experience displays the ultimate affective object of all of our experiences (i.e., what we ultimately seek affectively in all of our other experiences), then it is easy to see that this experience, too, would have to be unique. Consider any two experiences of "pure positive affect." Each of them, by containing what is affectively desirable in *all* experiences, would have to contain that which was affectively desirable in the other. But in this case of two simple experiences each containing nothing but positive affect, this would mean that each experience would have to contain the positive affect of the other; that would mean the content of the other as a whole, and the two experiences would thus have to be identical. Thus, no two experiences fulfilling the identifying description of pure positive affect

derived from standard experiential accounts could possibly have different phenomenological content.

The conclusion would thus seem to follow that pure consciousness and pure positive affect are phenomenologically unique as well as culture-independent. These uniqueness arguments, however, are rather formal, and the reality of most of our experiences is that they do not fit the formalisms of our linguistic categories and characterizations so neatly. It is easy to suppose, for example, that someone could have an experience the content of which was so faint and abstract that the experience would *seem* absolutely contentless, even though it was not. He or she could then be confident that the experience was empirically contentless—and then have another, more abstract experience that made it clear that the first one *did*, in fact, have some empirical content (content that can be either present or absent in any given experience), namely the content now recognized to be absent in the second. This then also raises the possibility of someone's having two experiences that are so abstract that he could be tempted to call both "contentless," yet that afterward both seem somehow different (presumably because of some faint content in at least one of them), despite the fact that one could not locate definitely any differentiating content in either of them. This, of course, might lead one to conclude (mistakenly) that one could have two phenomenologically different experiences of purely contentlessness awareness. The case of the sameness or difference of different people's putative experiences of pure consciousness experiences is of course even more problematic, for there is no possibility here of comparing them by inspection of the relevant memories. And comparing experiences had by people in different cultures, with different habits of conceptualization, discrimination, attention, and speaking different languages raises further difficulties once again.[16]

Evaluating the phenomenological sameness of experiences we have been calling "pure positive affect" presents us with even more problems. In the first place these experiences, unlike those of pure consciousness, *do* have phenomenological content, abstract as it might be. And this abstract content—positive affect, alone by itself—is clearly not the kind of thing that can be identified in terms of external publicly observable things. Second, descriptions from different individuals and cultures of what we have been referring to as a single simple experience use terms such as "happiness," "bliss," "ecstasy," and even "pure beauty"; these terms do not have precise, generally agreed-upon significance, and they can easily be taken to have nonequivalent connotations above and beyond that of simple "positive affect." Finally, while (as noted above) logically there could be at most only one experience that could display the affect that one ultimately sought in all of one's seekings, it surely seems that any claim that a particular given experience—no matter how affectively intense—actually displayed that affect sought in all other experiences would have to be a fallible empirical claim relating the given experience to an enormous number of other experiences. Establishing phenom-

enological uniqueness here thus obviously requires consideration of empirical factors quite outside the scope of formal arguments of the sort outlined earlier.

A great deal more can be said about such uniqueness problems. But my own view, despite the above difficulties, is that "pure consciousness" is clearly phenomenologically unique, and "pure positive affect" probably so. The deciding factor for me with regard to pure consciousness is that paradigmatic accounts in culture after culture assert as emphatically as possible not only that is there no content discernible in the experiences, but that there is not even any phenomenological "space" (subjective temporal and/or spatiotemporal manifold) for such experiences to be *in*. Thus, for these experiences having no *place* for any phenomenological qualities to be located in, the very notion of their having any content at all, anything that can qualitatively differentiate one putative instance from another, appears flatly unintelligible. This, at any rate, appears to be the natural response of many (including myself) who think they have had the experience in question.[17] The situation with regard to "pure positive affect," on the other hand, is obviously much more complex, and my preference for phenomenological uniqueness here amounts at present to little more than a suspicion, fueled by logical considerations of the sort outlined earlier.

It should be emphasized, however, that for the purposes of the following analyses, very little hinges on whether the experiences in question are phenomenologically unique or only closely related clusters. The crucial factor in these analyses is their independence of all (for pure consciousness), or almost all (for pure positive affect), of the ordinary contents of our experience, and this independence is unaffected by questions of whether the experiences turn out to be phenomenologically unique or clusters of related experiences.

Consequently, for simplicity, the ethical analyses that follow at first simply use "pure consciousness" and "pure positive affect" as though they refer straightforwardly to two unique, well-defined experiences. Then, where necessary, a few finer distinctions are drawn regarding the possibility of nonuniqueness.

ONE OF THE main problems of ethics concerns the conflicts between our desires and our duties. Indeed if there were no conflicts between what we wanted and what we ought to do, ethics as we know it would not even exist. Thus all ethical systems, whether formal or informal, must take into account the existence and nature of our desires. In general, then, what is it we desire? Common sense replies "Happiness," and this commonsensical response has been taken for granted by major ethical philosophers for thousands of years. But, as Aristotle pointed out, despite the general agreement that we all seek happiness, there is no comparable agreement as to precisely what happiness is. For when we get down to particulars, different people obviously often desire very different things.

The problems of defining happiness have continued to prove very difficult. Kant, for example, makes this quite clear. He acknowledged, of course, that

> all men have the strongest and deepest inclination to happiness, because in this idea all inclinations are summed up.[18]

Nevertheless, we

> can make no definite and certain concept of the sum of satisfaction of all inclinations which goes under the name of happiness.[19]

For

> the concept of happiness is so indefinite that, although each person wishes to attain it, he can never definitely and self-consistently state what it is he really wishes and wills. The reason for this is that all elements which belong to the concept of happiness are empirical, i.e., they must be taken from experience, while for the idea of happiness an absolute whole, a maximum, of well-being is needed in my present and every future condition. Now it is impossible even for a most clear-sighted and most capable but finite being to form here a definite concept.[20]

Thus, Kant concludes, happiness, which we all as conscious beings necessarily and inevitably desire,[21] is simply indefinable.

This problem of defining happiness in terms of the experiential situations that may make us happy has sometimes led to rejection of the notion that there is any single thing called "happiness" that we can recognize at all, much less desire for itself. Thus, while Aristotle had held that happiness is "the highest of all goods achievable by action in that we choose it "for itself" and other things "for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy,"[22] contemporary philosophers such as MacIntyre can argue that "the notion of human happiness is not a unitary, simple notion" at all, and consequently "cannot provide us with a criterion for making our key choices."[23]

> For there are . . . too many different modes in which happiness is achieved. And pleasure or happiness are not states of mind for the production of which these activities and modes are merely alternative means. . . . The happiness which belongs peculiarly to the way of life of the cloister [for example] is not the same . . . as that which belongs peculiarly to the military life.[24]

In short, MacIntyre concludes, happiness has a "polymorphous character," for "different happinesses are to a large degree incommensurable," and there is no single thing called happiness to desire at all, common sense notwithstanding.[25]

These problematic conclusions, however, can readily be seen to rely on a logical confusion. For there is an obvious difference between the subjective state or experience of being happy and the conditions that may evoke or produce it. This is not difficult to understand. From the perspective of common sense, for example, happiness (of course) is a single, readily identifiable emotion, philosophical arguments notwithstanding. One can be walking along, notice that one is very happy, and wonder "Why am I so happy?" just as one can notice that one is anxious, angry, or having any other emotion and similarly wonder why. This simple fact clearly shows that happiness (like anxiety and anger), as an emotional state, is identifiable independently of its evoking conditions (whatever they might be), and also therefore isolatable conceptually from such conditions.

Thus it would be surprising, to say the least, if happiness *could* be defined in terms of such conditions. The inability to define it in this way therefore does not at all indicate that the notion of happiness itself is either indefinable or incoherent. Indeed, the very attempt to define happiness in this way amounts to a conflation between very different kinds of things, namely a subjective state and its evoking conditions (whatever they might be).

Furthermore, if we turn to the perspective of modern psychophysiology, these results turn out to be just what we should expect. It is now apparent that the (natural or artificially introduced) presence (or absence) of neurotransmitters and/or other psychoactive chemicals can produce various emotions (elation, anxiety, depression, etc.) independently of the presence or absence of external stimuli ordinarily associated with these emotions. Accordingly, psychophysiological researchers naturally expect that the experience of each of our emotions, happiness included, will turn out to have a biochemical basis. If this is correct, each of our emotions, happiness included, ought, at least in principle, to be experienceable and identifiable independently of the experiential stimuli we ordinarily associate with them.[26] Thus our commonsensical observation that we do in fact sometimes identify such emotions, happiness included, independently of being aware of any appropriate evoking conditions, is just what we ought to expect.

Thus both common sense observations and contemporary psychophysiological theory would indicate that the subjective experience of happiness is both experientially and conceptually distinguishable from the evoking conditions with which it may ordinarily be associated. On this analysis, then, the experience of happiness is logically as distinct from the experience of its ordinary evoking conditions as the color yellow is from the various yellow shapes in which it usually appears. The color yellow can be experienced independently of each of these shapes, and indeed, if one were immersed in a completely undifferentiated yellow environment, independently of the experience of any shapes at all. The fact that yellow has ordinarily throughout one's life been experienced in conjunction either with some particular shapes, or even with the experience of shapes in general, is no obstacle to our recognizing that yellow and shapes are conceptually

(and experientially) distinct types of things. If the above analysis is correct, then, the fact that it has proven impossible to arrive at any satisfactory definition of happiness in terms of its evoking conditions should be no more surprising than finding it impossible to define the color yellow either in terms of shapes with which it may from time to time be associated or in terms of shape in general.[27]

No one, of course, would be likely to attempt to define a color in terms of geometric shapes. Yet the confusion of happiness with its evoking experiential conditions has been widespread and long-lasting. This latter confusion thus requires explanation. The explanation, however, is not difficult to locate. Generally, it would seem, we are happiest when we obtain things that we want and enjoy very much. Thus, even supposing, as common sense does, that we can put our attention on the happiness a situation evokes (as distinct from putting our attention on the things that evoke it), when we have gotten things we really want and enjoy, our attention is naturally likely to go toward those things rather than toward the happiness itself. In other words, the situations that can be expected to produce the most intense happiness would appear to be precisely those that will reinforce our usual association between happiness and the objects that produce it. It is thus no surprise that our notion of happiness should remain entangled with that of various evoking objects and conditions and, consequently, unclear and difficult if not impossible to define. In short it appears, ironically, that at least part of the reason the notion of happiness remains confused and bound up with those of objects is because we value it so highly.

WE ALL, OF COURSE, know how to identify the experience of happiness. We do this without needing to know, and indeed, as we have seen, without in fact knowing, which conditions will maximize it. Thus the problem of clarifying the notion of happiness is not one of grasping the evoking conditions with which it is generally associated. Indeed, just the opposite is true. For what we need to do is to disentangle the experience of happiness from the conditions that may evoke it in order to get the clearest possible notion of what happiness may be in itself.

It is precisely at this point that one of the experiences of deep awareness comes into play, for the experience I call "pure positive affect" can equally well be called one of "pure happiness." Indeed, it traditionally has been referred to in these terms and others equivalent to it ("infinite joy," "pure delight," "absolute bliss," etc.). And, more to the point, in culture after culture, this highly abstract experience, having nothing but pure positive affect as its content, by all accounts appears to be taken by those who experience it to be "the ultimate objective" of desire, "that which one wanted in everything else that one wanted," and so on. In short, it is immediately recognizable as uniquely and precisely fulfilling the usual philosophical understanding of what happiness itself ought to be.[28]

This identification of the experience of pure, abstract, positive affect as one of "pure happiness," if correct, allows us to resolve a number of questions about happiness central to many ethical discussions. First, it indicates that the problems of defining happiness are in fact, as suggested above, products of attempting to define happiness in terms of other things. Happiness, on this account, is as different from the objective conditions, possessions, and experiences that may evoke it as yellow is from the objects that may happen to display it. Like yellow, it is something phenomenologically simple, and it can only be defined ostensively through attention to it itself, rather than constructively in terms of other things. Thus, again like yellow, it would appear most clearly graspable when experienced by itself, in isolation from all other potentially distracting contents of experience. In short, the arguments of Kant, MacIntyre, and others notwithstanding, happiness now appears, as common sense would suggest, to be clearly recognizable as something conceptually simple and unitary and graspable in itself.

If our arguments are correct, happiness, in addition to being graspable in itself, is also evidently experienceable by itself, independently of other things. And, as experienceable by itself, it is also quite as obviously desirable by itself, independently of our desires for other things. Indeed, the mystical literature contains many accounts of people who have had this experience, found it immensely (if temporarily) fulfilling, and who, upon returning to their more ordinary modes of experience acutely desired to have it again, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Such observations thus give direct support to the commonsensical claim, made, for example, by Aristotle and disputed by MacIntyre, that there is a single thing called "happiness" that can be and is desired for itself. They also obviously support the equally commonsensical claim, again made by Aristotle and disputed by MacIntyre, that this desire for happiness, as coherent in itself, can and does play an important (if not ultimately dominant) role in our desires for other things.

Of course, it should be noted here that to the extent that the experiences I call "pure positive affect" are not phenomenologically identical, this conclusion about "happiness" has to be modified. For the cluster of abstract experiences properly referable to as "pure positive affect" would then have a more complex relation to the traditional philosophical notion of happiness. The gist of the above analysis remains unaffected, however, for even if the supposed diverse components of this cluster were to be identified as different types of happiness, the differences would hardly be the kinds to which MacIntyre's argument refers. These components would necessarily all be experienceable completely independently of all the roles, activities, and everyday phenomena with which his (and other kindred) arguments are concerned. Thus, even on the cluster-assumption, pure happiness remains something—if now a more complex something—that can be experienced and desired independently of all such relatively concrete phenomena.

Having seen, then, something of how the experience (or cluster of experiences) of pure positive affect central to traditional state-of-being approaches to ethics can contribute to ethical theory by clarifying the crucial notion of happiness, let us turn briefly to some practical ethical implications. Since, as should be readily apparent, it makes no difference for the following practical analyses whether "pure positive affect" is taken to be a single experience or a cluster, the phrases "pure positive affect" and "pure happiness" will for ease of style continue to be used interchangeably.

ETHICAL THINKERS AS diverse as Kant and Mill have emphasized that, all other things being equal, increasing one's own happiness is not only emotionally desirable, but also a moral duty. For, among other things, increasing one's own happiness obviously decreases the likelihood that one's selfish desires will interfere with or even block performance of one's duties toward others.[29] Thus we can first note the obvious fact that gaining the experience of pure positive affect or happiness should, and by all reports does, serve ethics by contributing to the overall happiness of the person gaining the experience.[30] To this we can add that the traditional state-of-being approaches to ethics typically emphasized that one should not only gain such experiences, but, as Plato put it, make them one's own permanent possession.[31] This, if actually possible, would obviously contribute even more to one's own individual happiness, and thus, by extension, to one's duty to develop oneself in ways that support fulfilling one's duties to others.[32]

This latter conclusion is, I think, more than just conjecture. For we have the examples of the sages, saints, and yogis, the exemplars of the state-of-being approach to ethics. Consider, for example, the case of Socrates, the exemplar of the Platonic and a number of other classical Greek state-of-being ethical traditions. In his *Symposium* Plato describes Socrates (1) as giving a detailed account of the deep inner experience of pure positive affect quoted earlier, (2) as insisting (in contrast to his usual denial of special knowledge) that he had special knowledge of the subject, (3) as having long periods of inner absorption (up to twenty-four hours in length), and (4) as displaying the kinds of ethically relevant effects described in the dialogue as the natural result of sufficient acquaintance with the experience in question (namely, being so fulfilled within that he was not at all seducible by money, reputation, sex, or other such temptations).[33] Thus, on Plato's account, fulfilling the claim made by Diotima (Socrates' teacher in the *Symposium*) that once one has attained this

> wondrous vision . . . [of] an everlasting loveliness which neither comes nor goes, which neither flowers nor fades . . . neither words, nor knowledge, nor a something that exists in something else, such as a living creature, or the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is—but subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness

one "will be quickened with the true, and not the seeming, virtue" and "never be seduced again" by such things as money or sex.[34] Plato also of course describes Socrates as being extraordinarily courageous and cheerful in the face of danger and deprivation.[35] To this we can add Xenophon's description of Socrates as living on less money than anyone else, yet being happier than others, showing that happiness is not dependent on such externals, but is instead a reflection of one's inner awareness.[36]

Thus we find Plato and Xenophon describing precisely the kind of psychological mechanisms and ethical effects that our analysis has suggested should be expected to follow from the level of inner experience described. For, as Plato put it, men (and women) of integrated psyche, filled with the kinds of inner awareness we have been discussing, will have "Gold and silver . . . of the divine quality . . . always in their souls," experiencing "the highest happiness" man is capable of achieving. As a result they will no longer be compelled to compete for ordinary wealth, "the metal of men," beyond what is needed for the necessities of life, having established the unique, proper internal basis for living morally and performing one's civic duties most wholeheartedly, cooperatively, and effectively.[37]

Such accounts and analyses are, of course, not unique to the traditions of ancient Greece. To the contrary, they are paradigmatic of state-of-being approaches to ethics, whether in the Zen, Taoist, Vedāntic, Yogic, medieval Catholic, Islamic, or other major traditions. Thus they are not dependent on the historical authenticity of any particular account, whether of Socrates or any other individual. The universality of the experiences, analyses, and anecdotal accounts, found in diverse cultures and historical periods, thus provides initial empirical support for the already plausible conclusion that the experiences in question should produce such ethically relevant effects. To this we should add that this conclusion also receives empirical support from modern psychological studies of self-actualization, for, as Maslow puts it, "Being-cognizers" are characteristically unusually happy, creative, and self-sufficient, in conjunction with, and presumably at least partially as a result of, their experience of the joy or bliss typically associated with experiences of "Being" or pure unbounded awareness. Only careful empirical studies, of course, could begin to decide this matter of causal efficacy conclusively. But already it appears to be more than merely plausible conjecture.

We have thus so far seen some of the potential significance of the experience of pure positive affect or happiness, central to many state-of-being ethical traditions, for ethical theory and practice. For the experience appears capable of clarifying the otherwise problematic concept of happiness central to much of ethical theory, and showing, among other things, that, as common sense insists, it is in fact intelligible to think of happiness as desirable in itself, despite arguments of MacIntyre and others to the contrary. And the traditional claim that this unique experience promotes the ability to perform duties in general by reducing the conflicts, central to most of the problems of practical ethics, between one's own

desires and the demands of duty, now appears both to be intelligible and to be supported empirically (if in a preliminary way) by the examples of saints, sages, and other highly "self-actualized" individuals.

LET US NOW turn briefly to some ethical implications of the related experience of pure consciousness. This experience, as noted, has long played a central role in the literature of the world's mystical traditions. It may not be at all apparent how such an experience, completely devoid of all identifiable empirical content, could have any ethical implications at all. Precisely because of its lack of empirical content, however, this experience has regularly been held by mystical traditions throughout the world to display the inner nature of the self,[38] and this identification of self with pure consciousness can readily be seen to have implications for ethics.

This identification of pure consciousness with the self, of course, raises important philosophical issues. Examination of these issues here, however, would take us far afield.[39] Therefore let us instead turn directly to the question of the plausibility of the ethically significant effects that state-of-being traditions (Yoga, Vedānta, Zen Buddhism, medieval Christianity, etc.) frequently hold following (supposedly naturally and spontaneously) from the experiential identification of pure consciousness with the self.

For some of these effects, at least, the plausibility is easy to see. In the first place, identifying the self with pure consciousness means identifying it with a level of inner awareness that is logically completely independent of all empirical qualities, roles, and self-images. Furthermore, this level of inner awareness is, as noted, intimately associated with abstract experiences of pure happiness, also experienced independently of all of one's objective roles and self-images. Thus the identification of self with the abstract level of pure consciousness experienced within could be expected to lead to greater subjective freedom, both conceptual and emotional, from the otherwise natural tendency to identify oneself in terms of specific self-images that one normally creates and attempts to sustain. It is thus natural to think that this sort of freedom from our ordinary concern for self-images should lead to greater flexibility and spontaneity in our thinking and actions. Furthermore, thinking of oneself as a conscious being, deeper than and independent of all external roles and empirical factors whatsoever, could be expected to make it easier to recognize one's common humanity with others. To the extent that one regards oneself as "sizeless" (that is, as independent of empirical roles and variables), the easier it should be to "put oneself in someone else's shoes." Greater compassion and less confinement by concern for racial, class, religious, and other barriers to recognition of our common humanity would seem to follow naturally. Thus, in short, the experience in question could be expected to enhance lack of concern with self-images and growth of flexibility, compassion, and sense of identification with humanity in general, in the direction of those

expressed so clearly in Zen masters, saints, yogis, etc., as the relevant state-of-being ethical traditions have long claimed.[40]

WE HAVE SO far seen something of what the experiences we have been discussing have to offer modern ethics, both practical and theoretical. But it is important to be explicit about what they do not offer as well. Earlier we noted that modern ethics, with its largely criteria-based, deductive approach, has encountered major problems. Happiness-oriented utilitarians, for example, sought a "calculus" of happiness, by means of which actions can be evaluated for the amount and/or quality of happiness they can be expected to produce, so that actions producing the greatest amount and best quality of happiness for all can be analytically deduced. But problems of weighing amounts and qualities of happiness within the experience of individual people and between different people, and problems of accurately predicting "how much" happiness will be produced in the long run even for single individuals throughout their own lives, much less for all mankind throughout history, have made it apparent that no such calculus will be forthcoming. Thus, while the experience of pure positive affect or happiness appears to clarify what it is we seek emotionally in our experiences (namely, happiness, the goal of utilitarian ethics), and to help us get it for ourselves and others, there is no suggestion that this experience will make possible the formulation of any analytic "calculus" of the sort so often sought by utilitarian thinkers.

Furthermore, while the experiences of pure happiness and pure consciousness may enable us to clarify and revise the role of happiness and pure self in Kant's criteria-based, duty-oriented ethics,[41] and while these experiences can help resolve the tensions between individual desire and collective duty in general, they do nothing to reinforce the notion, held by Kant and other rationalistic thinkers, that generation of simple, objective, mechanically applicable rational criteria for judging right and wrong can be developed.

In short, while the experiences of deep inner awareness clearly have much to offer to modern ethics, both practical and theoretical, they in no way suggest that any criteria-based approach, whether that of happiness-oriented utilitarians or duty-oriented moralists, can prove successful.

IN ADDITION, it is important to note here that even if the criteria-based approach could overcome difficulties of the sort discussed above, it would have to be supplemented by character-developmental approaches. Suppose that, despite the obvious difficulties, valid, empirically significant, universal criterial principles for ethics could be formulated. The formulation of such principles does not of course entail that they would or, psychologically speaking, even could, be followed. This would require development of the individual's character to the point that the principles, rather than other conflicting desires, be followed. Since in practice the demands of action often (if not typically) do not allow time for de-

liberation in terms of fundamental principles, following the adopted set of principles consistently would require the development of appropriate reflexive mental and physical modes of response, as Plato, Aristotle, Mill, and others have often pointed out. It would also appear to require development of virtues such as courage and justice, as MacIntyre has argued.[42] Thus the essential, complimentary role of external sorts of character development is easy to see.

The complimentary role of the internal sorts of character development is also easy to see, for any significant criteria-based ethics can be expected to conflict at various points with people's individual impulses for happiness, and the internal development emphasized by the traditional state-of-being approaches can, to the extent that it is successful, be expected to reduce this conflict, central to the problems of practical ethics, between one's impulses for happiness and the demands of one's adopted principles, as noted above.

Thus any universal foundational criterial approach to ethics would appear to require character-based approaches as its compliment. And, all matters of ultimate foundations aside, it seems reasonable to conclude in general that the criterial, external-character, and internal state-of-being approaches all have important complimentary roles to play in any optimal, fully articulated ethical system.

A MAJOR, RATHER obvious difficulty with the traditional state-of-being approach to ethics should also be noted here. The experiences addressed above have traditionally been associated only with small, special subgroups of the general population: religious mystics, ascetic monks, creative geniuses, and so on. How reasonable, then, could it be to assert that ethical theory and practice both should be concerned with such infrequently found experiences? Such rare experiences, confined to special types of people, would appear to have very little general practical significance.

This question appears most reasonable in the modern West, where the experiences in question have been both rarely had and little noticed.[43] In the East, however, for a variety of reasons, much more attention has been given to these experiences from antiquity to the present. Consequently Eastern cultures have for many centuries developed, preserved, and refined techniques for enabling people to gain them. During the past few decades, moreover, two of these groups of techniques, those of Zen and Transcendental Meditation, have come to be practiced widely throughout the world. As a result, the experiences in question are reportedly becoming more common, accessible even to ordinary people living conventional lives.[44] They have also, accordingly, begun to influence our intellectual world, having prompted a now extensive body of psychological, physiological, and behavioral research on the techniques, experiences, and objectively observable effects. This research now provides strong evidence that the experiences in question exist, are in fact attainable by ordinary people, and have ethically relevant psychological effects of the sorts we have been analyzing.[45]

The fact that these experiences are attainable by ordinary people through systematic procedures, as long claimed in Eastern cultures, now shows that they display something of the range of experience available to ordinary people, rather than merely the unique capabilities of those few extraordinary individuals whom we come to call "saints," "geniuses," and so on. Indeed, if the number of people practicing the relevant techniques continues to increase (as the literature suggests it will), and the experiences continue to become more common, it will become increasingly important to consider their implications for ethical practice, as well as ethical theory.

If the above analyses are even roughly correct, these experiences would appear capable not only of helping clarify fundamental components of our major ethical theories, but also of contributing in a practical way to development of such widely accepted virtues as unselfishness, compassion, and courage—not to mention simple enjoyment of life. In short, these experiences appear to have something significant to offer us in the field of ethics, so significant, in fact, that we can be said to have a moral imperative to enjoy them as widely as possible.

Notes

1. Compare, for example, Plato's claims that the true statesman, with an appropriately developed psyche, will be able to act well and promulgate good laws, while promulgation of laws will never reliably create good statesmen, lives, or states, (*Republic* 423d–27b, *Statesman* 294a–c, etc.); the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s insistence that for the truly enlightened, the Vedas (scriptures and laws) are as unnecessary as "a well in a flooded place" (2:46); and Zen Buddhism's canonical focus on an enlightened state, transmitted and attained entirely "outside of words and scriptures," as the appropriate basis for action and life.
2. It is interesting to note how radically Plato separated his "state of being" approach from all considerations of roles and external behavior. See, for example, Plato's introduction to his theory of the Good and the integrated psyche in the *Republic*, where he has Glaucus and Adimantus challenge Socrates to make precisely this complete separation between (1) the internal state of one's psyche as the foundation of justice and (2) all matters of social roles, status, and objective consequences.
3. Chuangtze, "On Leveling All Things," in *The Wisdom of China and India*, edited by Lin Yutang (New York: Modern Library, 1942), 633.
4. Charles Luk (Lu Kuan Yu), *Ch'an and Zen Teaching*, vol. 2 (London: Rider and Company, 1961), 20–22.
5. D.T. Suzuki, *What Is Zen* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 8.
6. *Mandukya Upaniṣad*, verses 7 and 12, in *The Principal Upaniṣads*, translated by S. Radhakrishnan (London: G. Allen & Unwin), 698, 701.
7. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *The Science of Being and Art of Living* (Age of Enlightenment Press, 1984), 52.
8. Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*, from the Medieval English version, in *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, translated into modern English by Clifton Wolters (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 211–13.
9. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Bhagavad-Gītā: A New Translation and Commentary* (Penguin Books, 1967), 422–24.
10. Ibid., chapter 6, verses 25, 27, 28, 18, and 22, pp. 432–39 and 418–25.
11. Plato, *Symposium*, 210e–211b, translated by Michael Joyce, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series LSXI, 1973), 562.

12. The first of the above experiences, pure consciousness, is widely held, following Walter Stace, to be the purest type of mystical experience. The second, as we saw, is closely associated with the first, both phenomenologically (because of its extremely abstract nature) and empirically (because it is often experienced in close association with the first). Indeed, the two experiences are so closely associated that they are sometimes conflated, even by scholars such as Stace, and referred to indiscriminately as "the" central mystical experience, despite the fact that they are clearly two phenomenologically different experiences, one having no phenomenological content at all, and the other having the abstract content of pure happiness or bliss.
13. See, for example, Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 75–100.
14. Compare, for example, Plato's insistence that "the vision of the beautiful" is "the same on every hand, the same then as now, here as there, this way as that way . . . the same inviolable whole, and, accordingly, cannot take the form of a face, or of hands, or of anything that is of the flesh . . . nor words, nor knowledge, nor a something that exists in something else, such as a living creature, or the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is." *Symposium* 211a, p. 562.
15. For an extended discussion of the phenomenological uniqueness and culture-independence of this experience, see Jonathan Shear, "Mystical Experience, Hermeneutics, and Rationality," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1990); and Robert Foreman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
16. There are, to be sure, other, albeit circumstantial, ways of evaluating sameness and differences of experiences, such as evaluating physiological correlates, psychological and behavioral effects, and so on. For some examples, see Shear, "Mystical Experience, Hermeneutics, and Rationality."
17. Compare, for example, the *Mandukya Upaniṣad*'s "Unseen, incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks, unthinkable, unnamable . . . [having] no elements, cannot be spoken of . . . non-dual," quoted earlier.
18. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis and New York: Library of Liberal Arts, Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), 15 (399).
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 35 (418). Compare also Mill's "Happiness is not an abstract idea but a concrete whole; and these [particular enjoyments] are some of its parts." John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis and New York: Library of Liberal Arts Press, 1957), 47.
21. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 33 (416).
22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1095a, translated by H.D. Ross, from *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 9 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), reprinted in *Great Traditions in Ethics*, 5th ed., edited by Ethel M. Albert, Theodore C. Denise, and Sheldon P. Peterfreund (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1984), 34–35.
23. Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 63.
24. Ibid., 64.
25. Ibid. Compare also Joel Feinberg, who argues that gaining a subjective state of happiness presupposes desiring something other than happiness. Consequently the desire for happiness itself is paradoxical and self-defeating. See his "Psychological Egoism," in *Reason and Responsibility*, 6th ed., edited by Joel Feinberg (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1985), 484–86.
26. Thus, on this account, being happy on seeing a particular person is logically akin to being anxious on seeing him. In both cases there is a primary perception (that of the person) and its underlying central nervous system activity, and consequent secondary neurochemical activity giving rise to the secondary experience of happiness or anxiety, as the case may be, depending on the experiencer's own internal state. And this latter neurochemical activity is presumably evocable, and its associated subjective emotional effects recognizable (as happiness or anxiety, respectively), independently both of the experiencer's paying any attention to the primary evoking conditions, and even of their having to be present at all.

27. In short, the notion that happiness ought to be definable in terms of its evoking experiential conditions involves an error akin to Moore's "naturalistic fallacy." See, for example, G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 6–8.
28. Thus, for example, while Plato referred to the experience as "the Beautiful" rather than "pure happiness," the fact that he held that this experience displays (in perfect clarity and simplicity) what it is we really wanted in all of our strivings and searching for happiness (whether through sex, art, intellectual knowledge, or any other activities), allows us to recognize it as one we can refer to as "pure happiness" in the context of our discussion, independently of Plato's own motive for referring to it as "the Beautiful" in the context of his own theories of desire, aesthetics, and the Forms.
29. For as Kant (surely one of the least happiness-oriented of ethical philosophers) put it, "To secure one's own happiness is at least indirectly a duty, for discontent with one's condition under pressure from many cares and amid unsatisfied wants could easily become a great temptation to transgress duties." *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 15 (399).
30. Gaining a clear notion of happiness itself, as distinct from the actions, objects, etc. it might otherwise be conflated with, can also of course be expected to help one evaluate more objectively the relation of such actions and objects to the amount of happiness they may produce, thus further enhancing one's own acquisition of happiness.
31. Plato, *Symposium* 211e, p. 563.
32. For, to use biblical terminology, it is obviously easier to "love thy neighbor" and work for his or her welfare to the extent that one's own "cup runneth over" with happiness from within.
33. Thus while Plato never specified the contents of Socrates' supposed experiences of inner absorption in the *Symposium* directly, the fact that he (1) repeatedly describes Socrates as regularly having these periods and (2) portrays him as describing the experience in question, claiming knowledge of the subject, associating the experience with wisdom, and displaying the effects predicted of the experience—all in the dialogue that has the experience in question as its focus and high point—makes it clear that Plato intended us to understand these periods of absorption in terms of this same unique experience.
34. *Symposium* 210e–212a, pp. 562–63.
35. *Symposium* 198d, 210c–212c, 214e–221b, etc., pp. 551, 562–63, 566–72, etc. Compare also Plato's and Xenophon's accounts (in Plato's *Apology* and *Symposium*, and Xeno's *Apology* and *Memorabilia*) of Socrates' legendary courage and determination to do his perceived duty, whether facing the thirty tyrants, in hand-to-hand combat, thwarting the Assembly's attempt to pass illegal legislation, at his own capital trial, and so on.
36. See, for example, Xenophon's *Memorabilia* I.iii.5–9 and I.vi.8–10 in *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, translated by E.C. Marchant (New York: Loeb Classical Library, G.P. Putnam's Sons), 47–49, 71–73.
37. *Republic* 461e, p. 661, for example.
38. Compare, for example, the Upaniṣads, Zen Buddhism, and medieval Christianity.
39. The initial plausibility of this identification of pure consciousness and the inner nature of the self, however, is not hard to understand. For, as Kant argued, the self is necessarily compatible with all of one's (actual and possible) experiences and cannot, therefore, have any empirical quality of its own (for these would interfere with other empirically possible experiences one could logically have). Thus, as Kant argued, pure self could only be a qualityless "pure consciousness," a "bare consciousness" having no qualities of its own. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965], 136 [A 107], 331 [B 404], 382 [B 430], etc.]) The actual experience of qualityless pure consciousness (the existence of which, we should note, Kant was obviously unaware) would thus appear uniquely qualified to be taken as experience of pure self. See, for example, Walter Stace, "What Is Mysticism?" in *Reason and Responsibility*, 82, and, for a more extended analysis, chap. 4, "The Self and Pure Consciousness," in Jonathan Shear, *The Inner Dimension: Philosophy and the Experience of Consciousness* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), "On a Culture-Independent Core Component of Self," in *East-West Encounters in Philosophy and Religion*, edited by Ninian Smart and B. Srinivasa Murthy (Long Beach, Calif.: Long Beach Publications,

1996), and "Experiential Clarification of the Problem of Self," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4, no. 5/6 (1998).

40. The above analysis of course remains unaffected by the question of whether "pure consciousness" is taken to refer to a single phenomenologically simple experience, or a cluster of such experiences, distinct from all empirical qualities, roles, and self-images.
41. The experiences in question can be shown to have implications for Kant's ethics quite beyond the topics discussed above, however. In particular, Kant's notions of man as a pure transcendental end-in-himself, the supposed a priori universality of rational beings' desire for happiness, the seeming "heteronomy" of their pursuit of happiness, and the nonanalyticity of the "imperative of prudence" all require re-evaluation in light of current knowledge of the experiences of pure consciousness and pure happiness.
42. See, for example, *After Virtue*, 191–92.
43. One notable exception appears to be a significant number of people in various fields whom we regard as creative geniuses. See, for example, Shear, chap. 5, "The Creative Process," in *The Inner Dimension*, for a discussion of the role of such experiences in the creative activity of creative geniuses such as Brahms, Wordsworth, and Einstein.
44. These include not only the basic experiences of pure consciousness and happiness, but also advanced states where these experiences have (as predicted by traditional state-of-being accounts) stabilized and unfolded into overall happiness, aesthetic beauty, love, desire to share with others, and so on. Compare, for example, the following from advanced contemporary American practitioners of Zen and Transcendental Meditation, respectively:

    > a sweet nothingness invaded my whole being. I . . . slowly came out of my trance. . . . A lifetime has been compressed into one week. A thousand new sensations are bombarding my senses, a thousand new paths are opening before me. I live my whole being, because I know that I am not just my little self but a great big miraculous Self. My constant thought is to have everybody share this deep sensation. (Mrs. A.M., school teacher, quoted in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, compiled and edited by Philip Kapleau [Boston: Beacon Press, 1972], 242–45)

    > [M]editations were wonderfully soft, delicate, blissful, and full. I felt completely unbounded and universal. . . . I began to experience such wholeness, completeness, and fullness as never before. . . . Eternal bliss and universal love seemed to overtake my entire being, and yet, it all seemed so natural. I felt an inexpressible gratitude. . . . I feel a growing intimacy with everything. Nothing seems foreign to me, I feel at home with everything, everyone. (B.S., college student, quoted in *Creating an Ideal Society* [MERU Press, 1977], 77–78)

45. The scientific literature over the last decade alone, for example, contains hundreds of journal articles discussing the mechanics, subjective experiences, physiological correlates, and psychological, physiological, and behavioral effects of Transcendental Meditation, Zen, Yoga, and so on, and it indicates that more than one million Americans have learned such traditional, formal meditation procedures.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Amoral Trickster or Mystic-Saint? Spiritual Teachers and the Transmoral Narrative

by Michael Stoeber

IN EXPLORING ISSUES in the morality of mysticism, it is helpful to observe the phenomena from the perspective of the mystic's life narrative. This life narrative is the "story" that provides the meaningful context for the mystic's changes in consciousness and way of being. Such a narrative approach to mysticism can be illuminating where the focus is not on moral issues, but it is specially appropriate in examining the morality of mysticism, for it fits so well with a current approach to morality generally: narrative ethics. William Barbieri Jr. describes this as the view that "morality is, at root, constituted by stories—that our judgments about right and wrong and good and evil, and our resulting actions, are dependent upon the stories we tell and are shaped by."[1]

For many people, of course, the stories that constitute their morality are not mystical. But mystics share a common spiritual strategy that is central to their moral orientations. They labor to remove those obstacles of self and society that inhibit realizations of spiritual dimensions of reality. Mystics are committed to the cultivation of an awareness of an underlying spiritual reality that radically transforms their mundane consciousness in ways they regard as ultimately important.

Although this "common strategy" is central to their moral orientations, the life narratives of mystics vary significantly cross-culturally, according to their religious and individual contexts.[2] These narratives provide the ideal of the "good" within which the mystic frames and orients her or his behaviors and attitudes toward others. They guide the reasonable determination of appropriate moral motivations, responsibilities, prescriptions, punishments, rights, and virtues, and thereby act to shape and form her or his character.

Religious mysticisms contrast with those of mystics who delve only intermittently and half-heartedly into the mystical life. Such mystic "dilettantes" treat mystical experiences under the umbrella of some other overriding narrative, either as curiosities or forms of entertainment or helpful practices. In this chapter I focus especially upon the narrative contexts of religious mystics. I do not give much attention to the sometimes antinomian behavior of the mystic dilettante, except to highlight issues that are relevant for the religious mystic. It is obvious that the immoral activities of some mystics have little if anything to do with their spiritual affiliations. Nonspiritual pathologies abound. What I am concerned about here is the question of the moral status of controversial *religious* mystics—mystics who, while involved in morally questionable behaviors, can and do coherently associate themselves with legitimate religious traditions.

This chapter focuses especially upon the moral status of religious mystics who function as spiritual teachers. I describe some of the controversial behavior and teachings of certain respected spiritual teachers who embrace relatively traditional mystic narratives. These figures raise major issues regarding the relevance of psychotherapeutic insights to spiritual transformation and the difficulties and dangers of the mystical path. In order to give some evaluative context to the subject of the spiritual teacher, however, I begin with an analysis of the relationship of conventional morality to the transcendent focus of the mystic's aspirations.

Narratives that postulate a spiritual reality and a mystical ideal that are wholly amoral are unable to link coherently a positive ethical orientation with the ideal of the narrative. That is to say, these amoral narratives cannot integrate or relate the mystic's postliberated moral orientation with his or her overriding spiritual goal, which is said to transcend in an absolute sense conventional moral life. No fulfillment of moral character comes in or through the liberating experience, nor does anything about the content of the experienced spiritual reality inform or confirm basic moral intuitions or orientations. These narratives even have difficulty in showing the relevance of moral requisites to the spiritual ideal.

So, in adopting a narrativist approach in considering the morality of mysticism, I hope to show that some mystic narratives are less coherent and less cogent than others. To illustrate these differences of narrative, I propose a simple comparison between two kinds of spiritual teachers. An "amoral trickster" claims in spiritual liberation to achieve an absolute transcendence of the rubrics of conventional moral life. Taken literally and to extremes, such claims can and have led to terrible consequences. In contrast, the "mystic-saint" adopts a "transmoral" narrative. In spiritual liberation, mystic-saints are thought to transcend in certain respects conventional moral life. Yet their liberated condition is said to invoke a concern and commitment to the spiritual well-being and transformation of other people. This transmoral imperative guides or ordinates a mystic-saint's sometimes unconventional moral behavior, and it provides a rough evaluative guideline by which one can begin to judge the moral status of spiritual teachers.

Moreover, some mystic narratives coherently link this transmoral orientation with the very nature of spiritual reality. In the third and concluding section of the essay, I illustrate the qualified nondualism espoused by some mystics cross-culturally. In these religious mysticisms the moral life is integrated with their transmoral experiences of a Divine that is both nondual in nature and creatively personal, thus providing a more coherent narrative context within which to understand and to justify their positive moral orientations and actions.

Morality and Ultimate Reality

Quite typical in Eastern mysticisms, but also to be observed in certain Western mysticisms, is the tendency to speak of ultimate reality as amoral—as utterly transcending all conventional moral frameworks. Consequently, the final goal of the mystic—to connect or identify with this underlying reality—is said to be also beyond moral reference. Arthur Danto puts the issue quite candidly, as it applies to some forms of Hindu mysticism:

> *Moksha*, which has a profound religious meaning, is not a moral concept. It *contrasts* with moral concepts, and in pursuing *moksha*, we occupy a station beyond good and evil, and so beyond morality. In seeking to fulfill this end, one turns one's back upon the world and upon the human scene. There is something inhuman in the concept of *moksha*, as is inevitable, given that our concept of humanity is inextricably involved with matters of good and evil and of life in the world it is the task and essence of *moksha* to remove us from.[3]

Some contemporary readers take exception to Danto's unqualified assertion that *Brahman* (ultimate Reality) and *mokṣa* (release from the cycle of rebirth) are for some Hindus something other than moral in quality and function.[4] This is because moral activity is usually considered crucial in the mystical path toward such ultimate realizations. Most Hindu schools do not suggest that one moves beyond good and evil while one strives toward *mokṣa* (forms of Hindu Tantra seem to be the exception). Specified moral requisites pertain to the positive character development of the spiritual aspirant, and they are regarded as necessary to the spiritual path. In evaluating the morality of mysticism, one must not isolate the mystic from the narrative contexts within which he understands himself; one must not decontextualize the mystic from his narrative setting.

The fact that religious mysticisms typically prescribe morality as an essential means in a mystic's spiritual ascent to the ideal is not to be neglected in considering the moral status of mysticism. At the same time, this factor ought not be overplayed. For as Danto aptly observes, in some Hindu mysticisms the religious ideal is explicitly characterized as beyond moral reference, and the mystic is said

to be transformed and reconstituted in ontological connection to this amoral reality. For example, Eliot Deutsch notes how in Advaita Vedānta *Brahman* is thought to transcend "all moral distinctions and that man, being essentially not different from *Brahman*, is likewise in his essence 'beyond good and evil.'"[5]

The *jīvanmukta* (liberated being) is said to move beyond the bounds of *karma*—the reality within which morality has its power—in his identification with *Brahman*. The mystic moves to a consciousness where morality has no place. Here the Real is usually depicted in nonpersonal terms. It is a nondifferentiated and inactive impersonal condition that transcends human moral dichotomies and sensitivities and requires for its experience, at least at a certain point in the mystical transformation, a letting-go and transcendence of moral frames of reference.

Such views of underlying reality and human morality are not exclusive to Hindu mysticism. There are mystics in Western religious traditions who speak of God, or at least a facet or mode of God and the experience thereof, as beyond the realm of human moral connotation and sensibility. For example, in his creative and provocative interpretation of *The Book of Job*, Stephen Mitchell depicts God and the religious ideal in similarly amoral terms. Mitchell describes the whirlwind scene as giving voice to a central and transforming religious experience that marks a mystical transcendence of archaic moral ideas about divine justice and God:

> This worldview stands, of course, in direct opposition to the Genesis myth in which man is given dominion over all creatures. It is a God's eye view of creation *before* man, beyond good and evil, marked by the innocence of a mind that has stepped outside the circle of human values. . . . What the Voice means is that paradise isn't situated in the past or future, and doesn't require a world tamed or edited by the moral sense. It is our world, when we perceive it clearly, without eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is an experience of the Sabbath vision: looking at reality, the world of starving children and nuclear menace, and recognising that it is very good.[6]

The paradox in this passage highlights well a tension in certain mystical writings between the claims of experiencing an amoral essence of existence beyond all human moral valuation and the consequent description of all aspects of the empirical world as good, including that which we would normally regard as evil. Another example, less clear perhaps, but more provocative, is a poem by the thirteenth-century Sufi mystic Rumi. Here Rumi gives voice to an experience of Allah that blurs traditional moral dichotomies:

> I hunger for those dust storms that whirl from our heaven
> I've known so much Apocalypse, nothing terrifies me now

My soul smiles and laughs: behind the mirror of Your butchery
She sees your Face-in-Love as you savage and kill.[7]

Unlike nondualistic Hindu mysticism, Rumi in his poetry stresses and passionately encourages a theistic union or identification with God, especially in love. But this poem, like Mitchell's reading of Job, seems to suggest a shattering of our moral sensibilities in a mystical experience that transcends conventional moral categories. This absence of moral relevance to an internalized spiritual reality raises a crucial question pertaining to the morality of mysticism: what is to keep the enlightened mystic from responding out of this experience in an amoral manner that would appear from the perspective of an unenlightened observer as dangerously immoral?

There seem to be two standard types of responses to this worry, both coming out of Eastern mystical traditions. The first tends to allude to the highly refined moral character of such liberated beings. It is argued that although the enlightened condition involves an amoral consciousness, such a realization requires advanced moral development. Karl Potter points out how in Advaita Vedānta the moral status of the *jīvanmukta* must be understood in terms of the technical dynamics of *karma*. Moral activity for the *jīvanmukta* becomes a matter of playing out the latent potencies of the *karma* that was acquired before liberating realizations (*prārabdhakarman*).[8] Because the enlightened amoral mystic has accumulated only good *karma* as requisite to liberation, postliberated activity can only be of a high moral status.[9] The mystic behaves according to his morally developed character at the time of liberation, even though he does not accumulate any further *karma* and possesses an amoral status. His continued positive participation in the moral life is secured by his highly refined preliberated moral character.

I critically evaluate this first response to concerns about the moral behavior of the liberated mystic below. But let me outline the second response to the question before turning to the problems facing the first response. The second response is quite different from the first. In her realization of transcendent reality, the mystic is typically said to have overcome the conditions of egoism out of which we normally function. She is thought to have achieved a selflessness, which is usually interpreted in a *transmoral* rather than an amoral context. Again in reference to a Hindu example, Steven Katz describes this kind of achievement in the following way: "That which karmicly bound selves perform out of duty, liberated selves perform out of their uncorrupted metaphysical awareness, their 'new being,' comprised of what the *Gītā* calls *niṣkāma karma*, without self-interested attachment, and *upekṣā*, selfless equanimity."[10] In overcoming her egoic orientation, the enlightened mystic is constituted by a selfless awareness grounded in this underlying reality.

But, given the claimed amoral status of this reality, what is to ensure a moral orientation on the part of the mystic who has identified with this nondual real-

ity? Katz goes on to explain that the answer is found in the oneness of the ontological Real. He says that because at an essential level all human beings and reality are one, an enlightened being cannot but act from a selfless concern for others: The liberated mystic "is selflessly concerned with the other for he knows that the other and he are one."[11] Indeed, contrary to Danto, Katz argues that what one finds in Hindu mysticism is a *merging* of the ethical and the Hindu spiritual ideals, rather than a disjunction of them: "The experience of liberation which is *mokṣa* is therefore also an opportunity for ultimate moral action."[12]

Katz is suggesting that the content of the experience, nondualistic oneness, naturally secures on the part of the mystic an orientation toward others that is positively moral, even if the individual would no longer be what we normally understand as a moral "agent." So, in contrast to the account given by Potter, which suggests a positive moral orientation of the mystic because of preliberated character development, Katz claims that the mystic will behave morally in positive ways given the very transmoral content of the liberating experience.

A similar perspective is espoused in some forms of Buddhism. David Loy refers to the Mahayana *bodhisattva* as a being for whom traditional ethical orientations are transcended in the experience of not-self. He characterizes the transmoral perspective of the mystic as a "non-moral morality" that is also a function of the transcendent mystical realization. Professor Loy writes: "When my sense-of-self lets go and disappears, I realize my interdependence with all other phenomena in that all-encompassing net. It is more than being dependent on them: When I discover I *am* you, the trace of your traces, the ethical problem of how to relate to you is transformed. We do not need a moral code to tie us together if we are not separate from each other."[13]

The "net" Loy is alluding to here is Indra's net. In the myth of Indra's Net, reality is pictured as an infinite number of jewels hanging in each eye of the heavenly net of the Hindu deity, Indra. Each jewel not only reflects the light of "all of the other jewels in the net," but also reflects the reflection each jewel gives of all the other jewels. So the myth "symbolizes a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos. This relationship is said to be one of simultaneous mutual identity and mutual intercausality."[14]

Buddhist philosophy, unlike Hindu perspectives, does not postulate a nondualistic Real at the core of existence. The point is to be rid of such false senses of substantial reality. But what is being proposed here is a condition of consciousness that would seem to amount to the same thing, at least as it applies to the questions of enlightened moral action. Cutting through the illusion of a substantial separate-feeling self, the awakened *bodhisattva* comes to see and to live out of a fundamental mutual interconnection of the "traces" of all things. That is the truth of the basic Buddhist doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent origination). Unlike the Hindu view that there is a substantial reality at the

core of existence within which we are all connected, this Buddhist view is that there is an underlying mutual identity of nonsubstantial traces. This identity ensures the fundamental sense of oneness that we also find in Hindu nondualism. It is out of these nondual realizations that the mystic is said to act transmorally in the world. Loy writes: "Ethical behavior is not so much the means of salvation as the natural, spontaneous expression of genuine enlightenment."[15]

Such views regarding the transmoral nature of mystic liberation seem plausible, I think, if the reality that the mystic identifies with at an underlying level has some positive moral content—something moral that informs this nondual condition. The mystic, through overcoming an egoic orientation that separates or isolates her from the spiritual truth that underlies phenomenal existence, becomes a medium or channel or expression of the experienced reality or liberated condition. Katz claims that in Hindu nondualism this is the experience of ontological unity. For Loy, Buddhist selflessness is the discovery of a "simultaneous mutual identity" of karmic traces.

But a realization of underlying oneness or mutual identity, in and of itself, without some moral context, will not ensure a consequent moral stance and behavior. R.C. Zaehner has illustrated this point provocatively in his exploration of the nondualistic mysticism of Charles Manson and his devotees. Overcoming egoic consciousness and *knowing* that one is connected with all other beings at some essential level might lead to selfless action, but it in no way necessarily leads to selfless *concern* for the other. "'After all,' Manson said, 'we are all one.' Killing someone therefore is just like breaking off a piece of cooky."[16] For Manson and his devotees, the experience of underlying oneness was consistently put forward to justify extremely cruel and inhuman activity, not to aid others in beneficent ways.

Clearly the narrative framework that guided Manson's immoral behavior is not religious, and he never exemplified the moral requisites typically put forward as necessary in religious mysticisms. No doubt Manson is but giving a nondualistic rationalization simply to justify extremely cruel pathological behavior. Nevertheless, his case illustrates vividly the possible immoral actions that follow from the postulation of an underlying amoral condition of unity that is thought to influence or affect the consequent moral activity of the spiritual adept who has experienced and embodied it. The overcoming of egoic motivations in a nondual experience of simultaneous mutual identity or oneness does not necessarily translate into altruistic action toward others. Indifference is quite compatible with an amoral nondual consciousness;[17] and so is mass murder.

As discussed below, many normally accepted moral perspectives and prescriptions are brought into question by the liberated attitudes and actions of some advanced spiritual adepts. However, extremely atrocious activities are deemed incompatible with the behavior of such advanced beings, and are used to mark off authentic adepts from pathological charlatans. The torture of children and mass murder are examples of exceptionally immoral activities that would prove

without question that the self-professed adept is a fraud. But the example of Manson raises the theoretical question of why, if the underlying reality is thought to be beyond all moral references, such judgments should be made. If the liberated being is acting *from* an underlying reality of human existence that is *amoral*, then *any* kind of (im)moral activity is acceptable at the level of personal relations.[18]

This criticism does not prevail in the case of the first response to the issue, where it is suggested that the enlightened moral orientation is a consequence of the mystic's preliberated moral development. The liberated mystic is not said to be acting *from* or *out of* such an amoral perspective. Instead, his or her continued positive participation in the moral life is secured by the highly refined preliberated moral character. But the example of Charles Manson also brings this response into question.

Those who hold that enlightened moral behavior is dependent solely on a preliberated moral character would not regard an extremely immoral mystic such as Manson as a liberated being, because he had not achieved the moral requisites to the ideal. But who is to say, given the amoral nature of the Real, that Charles Manson did not achieve the requisites necessary for the liberated experience? Or to frame the question within a narrative context, why should moral character development be a necessary requirement in one's pursuit of a realization of underlying Self or selflessness that is an amoral oneness or simultaneous mutual identity? What is it about the universe that should *require* moral requisites for an amoral spiritual ideal? How does the idea of moral requisites cogently fit into a narrative context that holds that the underlying condition of existence is an amoral oneness or simultaneous mutual identity?

The only answer to these questions seems to be that such a correspondence between moral requisites and liberation happens to be the way things are—it is just a chance-factor of the way in which the universe functions. In the absence of views that associate providence, goodness, and personal intention with transcendent reality and the structure of the universe, the response to these kinds of questions can only be one of chance happening. Spiritual liberation requires the dissolution of the ego that in turn is dependent on moral character development. This moral character development tends to ensure a positive behavioral orientation on the part of the mystic even though he or she has transcended the realm of distinction and differentiation where morality has its place.[19]

But there is no altruistic impetus coming from this egoless state—no fulfillment of the moral character in or through the liberating experience—nor is there anything about the content of the experienced spiritual reality that would confirm or support basic moral intuitions such as the wisdom that torturing children and mass murder are utterly evil actions. If ultimate reality is but an amoral oneness or simultaneous mutual identity, then there is no narrative context to creation within which one can understand the necessity of moral requisites to the

spiritual ideal, nor is there anything about it that would affirm or deny one's present moral consciousness.

Such a chance correspondence between moral requisites and an amoral spiritual ideal is possible but seems to me a rather unsatisfying explanation. First of all it does not reflect the way in which mystics and their biographers normally speak of the mystics' self-perfection as a function, at least in part, of the content of the experienced reality. This point has been mentioned earlier in reference to both Katz and Loy, and it is illustrated further in the next section of this chapter. But more importantly, something seems very odd and a bit too convenient in suggesting that there just happens to be a moral fabric stitched into a universe that is amoral in its essence and in its ideal of mystic liberation. It does not provide a cogent narrative picture within which to understand the moral life and certain basic moral intuitions. A better account is one that attempts to connect the moral life of the mystic with the very nature of ultimate reality. I outline this type of transmoral mystic narrative later in this chapter. But first I explore some key controversial issues regarding the moral practices of spiritual adepts, keeping in mind these preliminary observations concerning morality and the spiritual ideal.

The Spiritual Teacher

All spiritual traditions have authoritative figures who function as counselors or teachers. Examples include the Hindu *guru*, the Buddhist Zen master or Tibetan *lama*, the Sufi *shaykh*, the traditional shaman, the Hasidic *zaddic*, and the Christian confessor, spiritual director, and elder. These figures are transmitters of experience and wisdom who are typically thought to embody to some degree or another the religious ideals of their respective traditions. Given the dangers and difficulties of the mystical path that the aspirant must navigate, these spiritual adepts are regarded as very significant support figures.

These adepts typically acquire a great deal of influence over spiritual aspirants, given their role as respected teachers or guides. This influence is further accentuated in cases where the adept comes to be regarded and venerated as a spiritually perfected being or manifestation of divine reality. In cases where such a tremendous amount of authority is granted to the adepts, there are many opportunities for abuse on the part of charlatans toward their devotees or followers, or for horrible mistakes by deluded but well-meaning leaders.

Worst-case scenarios involve contemporary religious teachers extorting money, brainwashing and isolating their followers from family and friends, reorganizing their communities into paramilitary organizations, encouraging violence within the groups, or even leading their followers in mass murder or suicide rituals. As noted in the example of Charles Manson, such extreme and outrageous cases are, if at all, only very distantly and disputably associated with traditional spirituality and do not pose a particular problem for religious mysticisms. Although these charismatic figures pose serious problems for contemporary society and raise

psychological and sociological questions, the prima facie evidence points clearly to various personal pathologies at play rather than raising questions about the moral status of spiritually liberated beings. The cases become harder to explain in instances where well-respected teachers, who are widely regarded as spiritually advanced beings and associated with traditional religious theory and practices, are accused of moral improprieties in relation to their devotees. For example, Swami Muktananda, a contemporary Siddha Yogi of much influence and respect in India and North America, was accused of ongoing sexual relations with, in some cases very young, female disciples, despite the stress in his spiritual teaching on celibacy.[20] A more controversial figure is Adi Da (previously named Franklin Jones, Da Free John, Da Love-Ananda, and Da Kalki).

Initial impressions of Adi Da's intellectual and spiritual gifts were extremely favorable. He has been characterized as an authentic spiritual adept by many people outside of his religious community, including Alan Watts and Ken Wilber. Yet this assessment has since been brought into question by some observers, including Ken Wilber, in light of what is perceived as sexual improprieties, his cruel emotional mistreatment of his devotees, and his gradual self-isolationism.[21]

Adi Da is a polygamist who has had sexual relations with female devotees, including some of the wives of male devotees, and has periodically encouraged his students to wild orgiastic behavior involving sex and alcohol. These types of practices were particularly prominent during what has been called his "Garbage and Goddess" period. Georg Feuerstein, himself a onetime disciple of Adi Da, describes this period in some detail in his book *Holy Madness*. One episode he recalls involved the introduction of a "sexual theatre" that included "the switching of partners, sexual orgies, the making of pornographic movies, and intensified sexual practices—all of which led to the temporary or, in some instances, the permanent breakup of relationships."[22]

How is one to explain or justify these rather unconventional moral behaviors and imperatives on the part of a spiritually liberated teacher? Typically Westerners are scandalized when sexuality is integrated into spiritual narratives, especially when the male adept holds such an authoritative role in relation to his devotees. Spiritual orientations that draw in various ways upon sexual experiences, however, are regarded legitimately in religious traditions that stress an integral or embodied spirituality.

Contemporary spiritual narratives that integrate sexuality into the spiritual life often focus on the chakras. Deriving from perspectives in Indian religious traditions, chakras are said to be vortices of psychic and spiritual forces of the subtle body. These are normally unconscious and constricted within the human person. In embodied spiritualities, the process of transformation involves the opening and expansion of the chakras through appropriate spiritual practices, and the integration of their contents (energies, emotions, knowledge) with other

facets of the person. So, for example, Donald Evans, a contemporary philosopher of religion, speaks of a "spiritualised sexuality," wherein the emotional (passionate) and physical (bodily) intimacy of sexual intercourse is combined with the merging of the spiritual subtle body, that is, the union of the various life energies centered in the different chakras.[23]

Adi Da himself espouses in his teaching-narrative an embodied spirituality that stresses the integration of sexuality into the spiritual life. It is important to keep this in mind in considering the moral issues surrounding his unconventional behaviors and imperatives. In his commentary on Adi Da, however, Georg Feuerstein focuses on the tantric shock tactics Adi Da employs in his teaching techniques—the way in which he forces his devotees "to inspect and confront their sexual and emotional fixations in very concrete ways."[24] Spiritual adepts from all religious traditions claim that mystic transformation is an arduous task that involves a tremendous amount of resistance. The goal is a radical shattering of a conventional egoic awareness, what Adi Da refers to as the dis-ease of a fundamental "narcissism." Narcissism is a basic self-separating or differentiating consciousness that inhibits one's awareness of a fundamental connection to underlying spiritual reality. To break such deeply ingrained patterns of consciousness requires extreme measures. On this subject, Adi Da writes:

> Everyone is enchanted with unreality, enchanted with the conventional appearance of every moment, and merely talking to them does not break the spell. Talk is not sufficient because they are not merely thinking wrongly. They are altogether associated with this moment in a fashion that renders them incapable of being Awake to their actual Condition. In effect, you must cut them in half with a big sword! You must blow their minds. You must shake them loose. You must wholly divert them. You must trick them. To truly Enlighten human beings you must be wild.[25]

The kinds of claims Adi Da is making here regarding narcissism are not atypical to mysticism cross-culturally, though not all mystic narratives stress so radically this type of trickster orientation. Adi Da claims that spiritual transformation requires a radical shifting from a self-isolating and independent-feeling consciousness to a self-awareness of underlying reality which is, as Adi Da puts it, in a state of "unqualified relatedness, or non-separateness."[26] Donald Evans speaks of the process as an overcoming of "a defiant self-separation from the divine Source which lives [us]."[27]

Given the serious nature of the distortion—a rudimentary life orientation that is false—we can understand why such radical measures are needed to overcome it. Anyone familiar with the obstacles and the pain involved in overcoming

serious distortions in psychotherapy will appreciate what Adi Da is getting at in his account of the difficulties in overcoming narcissism. Deeply ingrained patterns of projection or transference can adversely affect one's adult relationships. Common examples are the way in which childhood connections to an abusive father or mother are carried over into relationships with adult authority figures, or when patterns of infantile attitudes towards mother or father are projected upon one's adult lover. These distorted patterns of perception and action involve much resistance and are very difficult to overcome. Moreover, Donald Evans points out how one tends to "transfer passions and strategies from infancy not only to our sexual partners but also toward God."[28] Indeed, these "passions and strategies" are themselves distorted extensions of narcissism, which in its basic form is a radical self-preoccupation that inhibits an awareness of one's spiritual ground and connection to ultimate reality. Feuerstein clarifies how normal patterns of consciousness that support a fundamentally false narcissistic orientation must be surmounted in the process of spiritual transformation:

> The spiritual process is inherently an attack on our patterns of meaning, our conventions about reality. It reveals to us their subordinate, even arbitrary, nature. The spiritual practitioner sooner or later comes to understand and accept that these conventions are ultimately inconsequential and must not be used as emotional crutches to justify the separative life of the ego-personality. . . . The transcendence of meaning in enlightenment, or God-realization, is the transcendence of the mind and the ego-personality itself. It dispels the myth of individuated existence. This is the crux of all mysticism and authentic spirituality.[29]

Extreme and shocking measures are required to break the conventional crutches of the ego and transcend it to a spiritual awareness of underlying nonseparateness. So in his tantric therapeutic orientation, Adi Da shifts very unnervingly for his devotees, from demands of a rather austere ascetic orientation to calls for wild orgiastic celebration. He has sexual relations with the wives of his devotees, encourages sexual orgies, makes pornographic films, and takes his disciples on drinking binges, all in order "to surprise, startle, bombshell, or shock"[30] them. One devotee comments on his view of Adi Da's elevated status as an amoral trickster: "the thing I recognised when I looked at Bubba [Adi Da] was that he is totally mad, absolutely mad—but that madness is absolute freedom. I realized that he could and would do *anything*, absolutely *anything*!"[31]

But surely this disciple is overstating the case—surely Adi Da, if he is a genuine spiritual adept, would not do "absolutely *anything*" in his role as spiritual guide. That is because genuine spiritual adepts espouse a "transmoral" narrative that ordinates their actions. To illustrate this narrative, I outline a rough and

simple contrast between the moral orientations of the amoral trickster and the mystic-saint, and relate it to these issues surrounding the spiritual teacher.

In *Holy Wisdom* Feuerstein shows how Adi Da's teaching is consistent with that of various figures of what he calls the "crazy-wisdom" tradition. This tradition includes the Christian Fool for Christ's Sake, the Islamic *masts* and *majzub*, the Hindu *baul* and *avadhuta*, and the Tibetan *smyon-pa*. Feuerstein's book is an interesting and insightful analysis of these and other peculiar amoral tricksters of mysticism who are noted for their bizarre and unpredictable dress and behavior and their unconventional and antinomian orientations. Their trickster roles are intended to "show that all taboos are human-made and to point beyond them to Reality."[32]

One of the more extreme and interesting characters mentioned by Feuerstein is Drukpa Kunley, a legendary fifteenth-century Tibetan *smyon-pa* ("mad lama"). His biography depicts him as a most unusual and unpredictable trickster. He was extraordinarily crude, blunt, and provocative in his criticisms of conventional standpoints, and he was especially noted for his powerful sexual attraction and prowess: in his efforts to spiritually initiate and enlighten, he is said to have had sexual relations with more than 5,000 women! But what I find more remarkable is a story about him killing an elderly disciple. Apparently in his liberated wisdom he had determined that it was her time to die; his actions were later vindicated by the eventual transformation of the corpse "into a body of light."[33]

No doubt these stories of Drukpa Kunley's exploits, like other historical accounts of spiritual adepts, have been aggrandized somewhat through hagiographical veneration. Still, Feuerstein suggests that murder on the part of a spiritual adept, what he calls "sacred murder," is considered an acceptable practice in both Buddhist and Hindu traditions, though with some qualifications: "The underlying assumption, however, is always that the 'murderer' is a fully cognizant enlightened adept, whose spiritual motives are beyond doubt."[34] Kunley is considered by Tibetans to be "a saintly figure whose enlightenment made him incapable of evil while liberating him from the moral preoccupations of his contemporaries."[35]

Feuerstein argues that these views about the "enlightened murderer" are consistent with the transmoral stance of nondualistic mysticism. The spiritual adept is thought to transcend conventional moral dichotomies in the overcoming of normal egoic consciousness and the realization of ontological unity: "Such a one is aware of differentiation, but recognises all differences as emerging and submerging in and as the same Being."[36] This nondualistic condition is what Adi Da calls "an unqualified relatedness or nonseparateness"—what in the Buddhist context was referred to in the first section of this chapter as a simultaneous mutual identity. This is a reality beyond the dichotomies of conventional morality. But it is important to stress how according to Feuerstein's own narrative account, authentic spiritual adepts are not acting immorally, even though they might appear

that way from the standpoint of a conventional moral consciousness. They are transmoral in character. They have become translucent mediums of a reality that transcends conventional morality.

Most mystic traditions do understand authentic spiritual adepts as transmitters of spiritual realities. I think this is the only way to explain adequately the incredible charisma that this type of character possesses. They become channels of powerful energies that attract, console, and empower devotees who have become open to them. This explains, for example, the strong magnetism Adi Da has upon his disciples. In his presence they "experienced visions, spontaneous body movements known as *kriyas*, bliss states, heart openings, and *kundalini* arousals."[37] But the point of such stimulation for Adi Da and other spiritual adepts, if they are anything more than amoral tricksters, is to help others overcome their narcissism and embrace and embody the spiritual realities that it shields from their awareness.

I think Feuerstein states a basic truth of authentic mysticisms when he says that spiritual adepts are "informed by the 'transcendental' motive to be a benign presence in the world, a vortex for transformation, and to draw all beings into the mind-transcending blissful condition that she herself" enjoys.[38] This is their transmoral imperative. It is certainly not of an amoral nature. The authentic adept is not an amoral trickster where absolutely anything goes, but a mystic-saint who maintains in her transcendent condition a positive orientation toward the spiritual well-being of others.

Indeed, it is this kind of transmoral spiritual narrative that guides or ordinates a spiritual adept's unconventional orientation. If Drukpa Kunley is justified in committing euthanasia (and it is not clear to me that he or any spiritual adept actually is so justified), it would only be if such an action would spiritually benefit the person in question. It would have to be a function of compassion toward the aspirant's spiritual well-being. Indeed, this transmoral narrative clearly distinguishes pathological mystics such as Charles Manson from the genuine article—the mystic-saint—and allows us to presume justifiably that certain behavior on the part of spiritual adepts is unacceptable. The very fact that there clearly are mystics whose immoral actions are a function of their psychological distortions supports such presumptions concerning the morality of mysticism.

Surely if Drukpa Kunley had gone much further than euthanasia—if he had gone on murderous rampages—we would be well justified in discounting his claims of spiritual enlightenment, and postulate rather some personal pathology at play, insofar as such action would be wholly inconsistent with the transmoral narrative. Surely if Adi Da publicly tortured his own children in his attempts as amoral trickster to shatter the conventional sensibilities of his disciples, he could not be regarded as an authentic spiritual adept. It is not the case that an authentic spiritual adept "could and would do *anything*, absolutely *anything*!" even if it might sometimes appear that way to certain spiritual aspirants.

Some actions are clearly unacceptable—actions that suggest with certainty that a mystic is acting out of a psychological distortion rather than spiritual insights and intuitions. Had Adi Da reached that point of unacceptability during his "Garbage and Goddess" period? Certainly his current devotees would deny such charges, whatever his critics might say. But such a discernment turns upon a number of complex factors pertaining to the mystic's narrative context, elements that are often disdainfully ignored in what seems to me to be a general antitheoretical/intellectual orientation of so many postmodern spiritual movements. Some of these factors are the role and significance of sexuality in one's vision of emotional integration and spiritual transformation; the status given to monogomous commitments relative to the importance of overcoming emotional and sexual dependencies; the nature and significance of personal relationships relative to the individual transformative quest; and the perceived dangers of such teachings and practices that religious mystics have traditionally acknowledged.

Spiritual adepts from all religions traditionally claim that self-transcendence is an arduous task that involves a tremendous amount of resistance and *danger*, given ingrained patterns of perception and various unconscious elements. Recent books by Michael Washburn have clarified and systematized these difficulties very helpfully, in mapping out the personal, prepersonal, and spiritual dynamics involved in ego-transcendence.[39] His transpersonal model suggests quite plausibly that spiritual transformation requires the regression into the personal and prepersonal unconscious, and the integration of their contents with the other facets of one's psyche. He describes the process generally as the "conversion of the mental ego, its deathlike regression into the unconscious, its reconstitution and transubstantiation in spirit, and its final integration and fulfillment."[40]

Relevant to the dangers inherent to spiritual transformation, he speaks of the instinctual-archetypal unconscious. This psychospiritual realm involves elements crucial to both our emergence as individual organisms and our constitution and survival as a species—what he calls, respectively, ontogenetic and phylogentic materials. Ontogenetic materials consist of those Jungian, universal archetypes of the collective unconscious relevant to the human individuation process. These are primitive energy systems, both positive and negative, which in the processes of spiritual transformation powerfully impact upon egoic consciousness, and can even overwhelm it. Phylogenetic material includes the survival and situational instincts and archetypes of our species, which are associated with such activities as childbirth and care, life stages, the acquisition of food, courtship, sexuality, self-defense, and so on.[41]

Given the hazards of powerful unconscious energies and instincts, and the tremendous resistance of the ego to surrender to a higher spiritual reality, there are possible psychological pitfalls along the mystic path. Psychological imbalances arising in this process of regression and integration might poison the relationships of spiritual teachers with their devotees. Unconscious contents can con-

tribute to various degrees of ego-inflation, perhaps even to diabolical mysticism, rather than to an overcoming of basic egoic tendencies.[42] One anonymous writer—a Roman Catholic hermeticist—speaks of ego-inflation as "the principal danger and trial for occultists, esotericists, magicians, gnostics and mystics."[43] He warns that "one must not take archetypes lightly. They are formidable forces which can also invade, inundate and engulf consciousness. This is what happens in the case of the *identification* of consciousness with the archetype."[44]

It is also possible that distortions of the sexual and aggression instincts might intrude upon the teacher-student relationship. Perhaps such distortions contributed to Adi Da's "Garbage and Goddess" period. These instincts are primitive and dominating, and when not appropriately acknowledged and contained or restrained can lead to very destructive consequences. As Washburn observes: "These are powerful instincts that can easily dominate energy resources and that, as Freud so clearly saw, can cause serious disruptions to rational and socially organised life."[45] Or as Donald Evans points out: "The turbulent passions and distrustful strategies to which sexual desire gives rise in infancy do not disappear, but are buried in the unconscious where they continue to operate secretly as the child becomes an adult."[46]

Terrible physical and emotional abuse occurs in relation to devotees if the adept acts out of dark and destructive elements of his personality. Altruistic guidance of one's devotees can become colored or displaced by the projection or transference of the adept's own neurotic dependencies, fears, aggressions, or desires. For example, Dick Anthony, a contemporary transpersonal therapist, points out the perverse kind of transference and countertransference that occurs "[w]hen an unrealized therapist 'plays the guru.'" In such cases the guru-therapist becomes dependent upon the devotee-client to satisfy his own fantasies, which leads to traumatic consequences. The devotee-client "projects infantile delusions of grandeur onto the therapist, thus vicariously satisfying them with the therapist's covert encouragement. . . . That person who should fend off the client's attachment by rejecting it on behalf of ultimacy instead may seize onto such attachments either by not denying them or by claiming to be ultimacy personified."[47]

The dangers here are made more pernicious by the fact that many fallen adepts seem to maintain some of their spiritual powers (for example, to channel healing energies, to induce heart openings, or to generate other altered conscious states) despite their capitulation to certain psychological disorders. This suggests that the process of spiritual transformation is a much more complicated dynamic than many contemporary spiritual movements tend to acknowledge, involving an ongoing shifting and interplay between various psychic and authentic spiritual material. It also suggests that one must be very careful before pronouncing anyone to be a "liberated" being and wary toward those who make such absolute claims.

Unconventional moral behavior on the part of an authentic spiritual teacher must fit coherently within an overriding spiritual narrative that focuses on the

welfare of their spiritual devotees, even if the mystical insights of the adept are beyond the ken of the aspirant. Extremely immoral action that contradicts this transmoral narrative is a clear sign of pathology rather than amoral freedom and insight. But such discernment becomes more difficult in cases of lesser moral significance. That is because the role of a spiritual teacher is to challenge the aspirant's resistance to the transformative dynamic—to confront their narcissistic fears, obsessions, and dependencies. In certain cases such a spiritual overcoming requires radical and extreme demands that might, from a conventional standpoint, appear morally dubious. But it seems to me legitimate to demand from a spiritual adept an explanation regarding morally unconventional teachings and practices. The failure of spiritual teachers to provide an intelligible transmoral context for certain actions toward their devotees raises serious questions regarding their motives and intentions.

It does make some sense to speak of authentic spiritual adepts as having transcended conventional moral dichotomies as a result of their spiritual transformation, insofar as their orientations are being informed by the realities and insights of their spiritual experiences. But it is appropriate to speak of the status of such adepts as "transmoral" rather than "amoral," in order to mark off the narrative that is driving their moral perspective. Conventional morality is transcended by the adept's commitment to the spiritual enhancement of other people, in the light of the insights and intuitions gained in her spiritual realizations. But that does not mean that the adept may act amorally in any absolute sense. Such a claim is nonsense. The liberated perspective of the adept is colored by the content of her transcendent experiences and her vocation as "a vortex for transformation," as Feuerstein puts it. But it is still moral. Conventional moral narratives are transcended by this higher spiritual narrative—not by an amoral oneness that grants the adept the freedom to do absolutely anything.[48]

Indeed, how could such a positive, transmoral orientation be grounded intelligibly in a condition of absolute amoral nondualism? This point is made earlier in the chapter: an experience of amoral oneness or mutual identity, in and of itself, is a condition that in no way ensures a positive concern toward others or even toward oneself. For example, as quoted earlier, Adi Da speaks of a nondual condition of "unqualified relatedness or nonseparateness" underlying conventional, differentiated consciousness. But whether this condition of "unqualified relatedness" involves a context of indifference, envy, competition, hatred, or compassion is a crucial question that requires some moral reference. That is to say, properly speaking there is no such thing as a condition of "unqualified relatedness." In another passage Adi Da himself qualifies in a transmoral fashion this nondual condition: "in fact, there is only relationship, *only love*, only unqualified relatedness, only the unqualified living condition of Reality."[49] So even for Adi Da, this "unqualified relatedness" is in fact qualified. It is a love relationship.

A transmoral imperative to a vocation of benevolent action toward the spiritual transformation of others cannot be grounded in an amoral condition of nonduality that has no moral qualification. Sophisticated nondualists recognize the radical gulf between an amoral condition of nondifferentiation and conventional moral life, and so they move to explain beneficent vocations on the part of liberated beings in terms of the moral prerequisites of the amoral spiritual ideal. In this view it is one's preliberated moral character that ensures a positive postliberated moral orientation, not the experience of amoral unity.

As mentioned at the end of the first section of this chapter, however, this move to account for such a positive, liberated orientation in terms solely of moral prerequisites does not reflect the common tendency to speak of it as a function of the underlying spiritual reality that has been internalized by the adept. Moreover, as I said, there seems something very odd and a bit too convenient in suggesting that there just happens to be a moral fabric stitched into a universe that is amoral in its essence and in its ideal of mystical liberation. It does not provide a cogent narrative picture within which one can understand the moral life and certain basic moral intuitions. A better account is one that attempts to connect the moral life of the mystic with the very nature of ultimate Reality.

Spiritual Reality and the Transmoral Narrative

Some mystics in both Eastern and Western religious traditions confirm this nondualistic sense of an amoral oneness or simultaneous mutual identity in their spiritual experiences, but they speak also of other aspects or facets of underlying spiritual reality to which their transmoral perspectives can be coherently connected. Cross-culturally, a variety of mystics espouse various forms of qualified nondualism in this regard. For these mystic-saints transcendent reality is not merely an amoral oneness to which human beings are connected at an underlying ontological level, but it is also positively creative and the Good in some absolute sense.

Indeed, these mystics speak of dynamic and personal elements of spiritual reality as intimately linked and associated with a static and amoral reality with which human beings are identified at some essential level of their being. The point for the spiritual aspirant is to relinquish her egoic self and shift her mode of awareness to this level of nonduality, in order to be reborn, so to speak, as a *transmoral* medium or channel of dynamic and personal energies, especially love, that are also aspects of this spiritual reality. Religious narratives that draw together in this way various kinds of spiritual experiences are what I call "theomonistic" mysticism, because of the way in which they integrate monistic and theistic elements into their mystic narrative.[50]

Some good examples of mystics who exemplify in their own specific ways this general kind of spiritual dynamic include Aurobindo Ghose, Abhishiktananda, Jacob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, Ramanuja, Teresa of Avila, and Jan Van Ruysbroek. Within their own narrative contexts, which are tradition-specific and individually

distinctive, these mystics tend to view amoral nondualistic experiences as the consciousness of a fundamental oneness or unity at some basic level of all created being. This condition is realized in the radical overcoming of one's separate and independent, egoic awareness. But this condition of passive unity does not constitute the entirety of spiritual reality, and such an awareness is not the final goal of the spiritual life. Indeed, it is via such mystical movements that one becomes most fully open and able to draw into the moral life insights and energies of a Divine that is also active and personal.

Sri Aurobindo Ghose, a modern Hindu adept, speaks of the necessity of achieving a condition of psychic integration in order to become fully aware of and immersed in the essential monistic unity underlying phenomenal existence. He writes that when this harmony of the various facets of the person becomes

> firmer and more complete the system is more able to hold consistently and vividly the settled perception of the One in all things and beings, in all qualities, forces, happenings, in all this world-consciousness and the play of its workings. That founds the Unity and upon it the deep satisfaction and growing rapture of the Unity.[51]

His mystical transmoral narrative is extended into a personalist, theistic context, however, as he suggests that the Divine is more than this Unity; and he further claims that the personalist elements associated with this Divine can be embodied by the mystic who has become open to them through monistic ascesis, and thereby can be drawn into her or his sociomoral context:

> When the Unity has been well founded, the static half of our work is done, but the active half remains. It is then that in the One we must see the Master and his Power,—Krishna and Kali as I name them using the terms of our Indian religions; the Power occupying the whole of myself and my nature which becomes Kali and ceases to be anything else, the Master using, directing, enjoying the Power to his ends, not mine, with that which I call myself only as a centre of his universal existence and responding to its workings as a soul to the Soul, taking upon itself his image until there is nothing left but Krishna and Kali.[52]

Clearly Aurobindo espouses a transmoral narrative that integrates nondualistic monism with personalist theism, in an embodied spirituality that envisions the mystic-saint as ideally a particular manifestation or instrument of the Divine. But the process is arduous and complex, and involves for Aurobindo a psychic harmony and stability that includes the integration of the various facets of one's person with spiritual reality.

Some Christian mystics similarly espouse this kind of transmoral narrative, though the dynamic is imaged in the symbols of Christian theology and the ideal of embodiment is modelled by Jesus. So Jan Van Ruysbroek, a fourteenth-century Christian mystic, speaks of the experience of the Trinity in its monistic unity—of being "united without mean with God" in that context. But he goes on to say: "In this unity we are received by the Holy Ghost, and we receive the Holy Ghost and the Father and the Son and the Divine nature."[53] That is to say, passive monistic unity issues forth in the theistic elements associated with the Persons of the Trinity. Ruysbroek insists: "This exalted unity of the Divine nature is a living, fertile unity."[54] For Ruysbroek, the Christian mystic comes through mystical union "to share," as Louis Dupré describes it, "the dynamics of God's inner life, a life not only of rest and darkness, but also of creative activity and light. The contemplative admitted to this union is granted to see by the light in which God sees Himself and to follow the outflowing movement of the Godhead."[55]

In a close parallel, Jacob Boehme, a sixteenth-century Christian mystic, develops in his mysticism of the will a transmoral perspective also informed by spiritual experiences. He depicts the dynamic in terms of a transformation in nondualism of a fundamentally self-oriented will into a positive medium or instrument of divine energy:

> But the will which has turned round, so that it has been born anew in the divine ouflow of love, to that gave he power to become God's child. For it is not the natural, individual will can inherit the divine childship, but only that which, united with the Unity, is one with all things, in which God himself works and wills. Wherein we clearly understand how the inward ground has extroverted itself and made itself visible, and is a peculiar possession of God, as an efflux of divine power and will.[56]

Boehme, like Aurobindo, Ruysbroek, and certain other mystics, integrates nondualistic experiences into his transmoral narrative by suggesting an experiential dynamic wherein the mystic shifts from a static unitive awareness to a theistic merging with other creative and personalist elements of the Divine. At a certain underlying level of consciousness—in amoral experiences of essential unity—the mystic does transcend normal categories of experience, including conventional moral concerns. But it is this very transcendence that opens the mystic up to other aspects of the spiritual Real, insights and energies that charge and confirm and accentuate the moral life to which the liberated mystic returns colored by her immersion in ontological unity.[57]

These narratives contrast vividly with those that maintain a strict dichotomy between the moral life and amoral realizations of the spiritual ideal. Indeed, they provide a more coherent and cogent context for the very positive moral perspec-

tives of mystic-saints. They also differ radically from the narratives of amoral tricksters, who claim the freedom to do absolutely anything. Mystic-saints live within and act out of a transmoral narrative, focusing compassionately upon the welfare of others. For some of them, this imperative to compassion is a function of the very spiritual presences and energies that they claim to realize and embody. They seek in this transmoral narrative to help others realize similar manifestations of the Divine.

IN CONCLUSION, I briefly contextualize my development in this chapter within the introductory debate of this volume between Jeffrey Kripal and G. William Barnard in chapters 1 and 2. I argue in the first section that from a narrative standpoint mysticisms cannot ground or justify a social-ethical orientation in the nature of a monistic spiritual ideal. This relates to the claim made by Professor Kripal that "mystical systems are socially and ethically problematic precisely to the extent that they adopt or express themselves within a monistic ontology." These difficulties follow from the very nature of the monistic ideal and are acknowledged even by some significant nondualistic mystics. Though one might insist upon a chance correspondence between moral requisites and a spiritual ideal that is amoral, there nevertheless can be no coherent narrative connection or necessity between moral requisites and such a spiritual ideal, nor is there anything about the ideal that would affirm or deny the mystic's present or previous moral consciousness and intuitions.

Nevertheless, as G. William Barnard suggests in chapter 2, monistic mysticism is only one piece of a very complex phenomena. Most mystics in fact do stress the spiritual importance of the transformative effects of their experiences, and this is often given sociomoral significance. In the second and third sections, I argue that a more compelling mystical narrative espouses a transmoral rather than an amoral ideal. It suggests that the nondualistic mystical experience is qualified by some mystics to include elements that positively inform their moral perspective and actions. Though the evidence would seem to support strongly the claims of a static and amoral condition with which many mystics identify at some essential level of their being, some mystics maintain that the Reality of these nondual experiences is not simply or solely a monistic oneness. Moreover, they insist that this Reality comes to inform their sociomoral life. We can speak intelligibly of a mystical ascesis that occurs for some mystics through their monistic immersion, and an opening thereby to the transmoral insights and energies of a Divine that is also active, personal, and moral. Thus the transmoral Reality finds its expression in the various orientations and actions of the mystic-saint. In the final section of this chapter I illustrate this dynamic in reference to some significant mystics from the Christian and Hindu traditions.

But in the context of this particular transmoral narrative, the mystic can succumb to various emotional disturbances and disorders. As I argue in the sec-

ond section, the spiritual ideal of this perspective is typically depicted as dependent upon and involving an emotional, spiritual, and bodily integration and transformation that is arduous and even dangerous. In this regard, spiritual direction might require a fair amount of unconventional challenges on the part of the teacher toward her or his student or devotee. But it is also through reference to various possible psychological distortions that we might begin to account for the antinomian orientations and activities of some religious mystics. The difficulties associated with overcoming and transcending a deep-seated narcissism help us to understand why from this transmoral narrative some religious mystics tend clearly to go wrong. In this regard, claims made by some spiritual teachers of an absolute freedom from all moral contexts are indicative of serious psychological distortions. Within this transmoral narrative, spiritual teachers are not utterly free from all moral constraints. Instead, they are guided by a transmoral imperative that calls them to strive, as Professor Barnard describes it, "to live in this world as a transparent conduit of the wisdom, compassion, and power that they discover in the depths of their mystical experiences."[58]

Notes

1. Barbieri argues: "From this supposition about morality it follows that ethics, in its methods, should recognise the primacy of the narrative." He defines narrative as "the way in which we create or use coherent linguistic forms to interpret, evaluate, and represent the situations in which we find ourselves." "Ethics and the Narrated Life," *Journal of Religion* 78, no. 3 (1998): 362, 366. In his essay Barbieri helpfully illuminates common narrativist claims in an overview and analysis of the thought of Iris Murdoch, Martha Nussbaum, and Stanley Hauerwas. He constructively relates these narrativist claims to contemporary epistemological concerns about agency.
2. In regard to these various narrative contexts, Stephen Katz writes: "I would call attention to the fact that mystics share not only the metaphysical problematic, the metaphysical diagnosis of existence, as this is conceptualized within their particular traditions, but also view its overcoming or deconstruction in ways consistent with the teachings of their 'faith' communities. They are, that is to say, fully situated in the ontological, theological, and social contexts of their tradition. Essentially, they share the *Weltanschauung* of their inherited circumstances and seek to realize, experience, the 'solutions' proposed by their tradition" (253). "Ethics and Mysticism in Eastern Mystical Traditions," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 253–67. See also "Mysticism and Ethics in Western Mystical Traditions," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 407–23.

   James R. Horne also brings a strong narrativist orientation in his studies of moral issues of mysticism. See *The Moral Mystic* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1983) and *Mysticism and Vocation* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996).
3. Arthur C. Danto, *Mysticism and Morality: Oriental Thought and Moral Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 63–64.
4. For example, Steven Katz claims that Danto, John McKenzie, and Albert Schweitzer are "untrue to the diverse, polymorphous character of Hindu thought." "Ethics and Mysticism in Eastern Mystical Traditions," 256.
5. Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969), 99–100, as quoted by Sengaku Mayeda in Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadeśasāhasrī of Śaṅkara*, translated and edited by Sengaku Mayeda (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 89.

6. Stephen Mitchell, trans., *The Book of Job* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), xx–xxi.
7. Andrew Harvey, *Love's Glory: Re-Creation of Rumi* (San Francisco: Balthazar Books, 1996), 45.
8. In reference to Śaṅkara's view on the matter, Andrew O. Fort writes: "*BāU* I.4.7 and 10 put most strongly that, while knowledge halts almost all effects of ignorance, *prārabdha karma* is stronger than *jñāna* [liberating knowledge]. Past activity causing a body must bear fruit, so bodily and mental activity necessarily continues, even after obtaining right knowledge (like the loosed arrow must finish its flight)." *Jivanmukti in Transformation: Embodied Liberation in Advaita and Neo-Vedānta* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 38.
9. Karl Potter, *Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṅkara and His Pupils*, in vol. 3 of *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 32–38. See the reference to this point in Michael Stoeber, *Theo-Monistic Mysticism: A Hindu-Christian Comparison* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), 48–49. For a list of various character requisites necessary to liberation according to Śaṅkara, see Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings*, 90, 92–93, and 212 (II, 1, 4–6).
10. Katz, "Ethics and Mysticism in Eastern Traditions," 257.
11. Ibid., 258. Very similar views are espoused by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Swami Vivekananda, both modern neo-Vedāntins. In *Jivanmukti in Transformation*, Andrew O. Fort writes that Vivekananda "claimed that when we feel oneness in human nature and with the universe, we 'rush forth to express it. . . . This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality. This is summed up in the Vedānta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism *Tat Tvam Asi*, 'Thou Art That'" (177). Similarly, Radhakrishnan "claims that *tat-tvam-asi* 'is bound up with an ethic of active service'" (180), which he associates with a selfless detachment.

    Such accounts of liberated ethical action are apparently novel to the tradition. For, as Fort also points out in his discussion of Vivekananda's teaching on the *jīvanmukta*, Paul Hacker "found no evidence that the metaphysical identity statement *'tat tvam asi'* was ever used [in Sanskrit literature] to justify 'practical' ethical imperatives as Vivekananda attempts to do" (177).
12. Katz, "Ethics and Mysticism in Eastern Traditions," 258.
13. David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996), 107–8.
14. Francis H. Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 2, as quoted by Loy in *Lack and Transcendence*, 90.
15. Loy, *Lack and Transcendence*, 107.
16. R.C. Zaehner, *Our Savage God: The Perverse Use of Eastern Thought* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974), 67. I previously made reference to this example in *Evil and the Mystics' God: Towards a Mystical Theodicy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 122.
17. Richard H. Jones points this out in reference to the question of grounding morality in amoral nondual experiences: "the enlightened mystic may not be `evil' in the sense of harming others for personal gain since all selfish motivations are ended, but he or she may be simply indifferent. A sage need not be a saint." *Mysticism Examined: Philosophical Inquiries into Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 193.
18. Katz would seem to agree with this concern as it applies to Hinduism. He says, if "*brahman* = The Good, including in some absolute sense ethical characteristics, then the liberated self would not do ethical (or other) harm for such harm would be contrary to one's non-dualistic Oneness. However, if *brahman* is understood as a morality-transcending, meta-ontic X then this entailment would not necessarily, or even probably, apply." "Ethics and Mysticism in Eastern Mystical Traditions," 261.
19. It is interesting to note how in this regard Śaṅkara even postulates the possibility that a *jīvanmukta*, despite the realization of liberating knowledge, might undergo a re-embodiment or two, in order to fulfill, as Andrew Fort describes it, a "commission" (*adhikāra*) that "exists due to the condition of the world." But such a "commission requiring re-embodiment" is in Śaṅkara's view a consequence solely of *prārabdhakarman*. It is not stimulated by the nature of the liberating experience or by ultimate reality. See *Jivanmukti in Transformation*, 39–40.

20. Dick Anthony, Bruce Ecker, Ken Wilber, eds., *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognising Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation* (New York: Paragon House, 1987), 22. For an interesting account of the controversies, see Liz Harris, "Annals of Religion: O Guru, Guru, Guru," *New Yorker* (14 November 1994): 92–109.
21. See the various favorable review comments on the back cover and first three pages of Adi Da, *The Knee of Listening* (Middletown, Calif.: Dawn Horse Press, 1995). This book was first published in 1972. For example, Alan Watts says, "It is obvious, from all sorts of subtle details, that he knows what IT's all about . . . a rare being." Ken Wilber remarks, "My opinion is that we have, in the person of Adi Da, a Spiritual Master and religious genius of the ultimate degree."

    It is interesting to note how Ken Wilber has since changed his endorsement from that of Adi Da the person, to that of Adi Da's major book, *The Dawn Horse Testament*, which he regards as "one of the very greatest spiritual treatises, comparable in scope and depth to any of the truly classic religious texts." In regard to Adi Da, he now considers him to have fallen prey to "personality problems." He says, "In ways that we are just beginning to understand, some types of spiritual development can run way ahead of moral, social, interpersonal, and wisdom development in general." From the Wilber Site Home Page, Shambhala Publications (1996, 1997). My thanks to Glenn Friesen, who informed me of this shift in Wilber's perspective and kindly gave me the detailed quotes.
22. Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy-Wise Adepts, Holy Fools, and Rascal Gurus* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), 86–87.
23. "Life energies flow unimpeded from feet to crown and from crown to feet, and one realizes that basically the *same* life energies are being changed: from the dense, fiery vibrations in the genitals to the refined, delicate pulsations in the crown, and vice versa. And sometimes one can experience loving life energies entering the heart, spreading down to the genitals and up to the eyes, and then flowing outward through genitals and the heart and eyes to a beloved partner as one makes love." Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 88.
24. Feuerstein, *Holy Madness*, 86.
25. Da Free John [Adi Da], *God Is Not a Gentleman and I Am That One* (Clearlake, Calif.: Dawn Horse Press, 1983) 58. As quoted in Feuerstein, *Holy Madness*, 98.
26. Adi Da, *The Knee of Listening*, 201.
27. Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature*, 90. Evans develops in this book a lucid and detailed analysis of the dynamics and various forms of narcissism. See especially Section 1.II.
28. Ibid., 79. See also 182 and 184, where Evans further develops the nature of this spiritual distortion in reference to the thought of Thomas Merton.
29. Feuerstein, *Holy Madness*, 175.
30. Ibid., 88.
31. Ibid., 89.
32. Ibid., 229. June McDaniel also speaks of the trickster role in Bengali devotional movements, where the ecstatic guru teaches "his disciples a lesson by violating their narrow understandings of religion with unexpected and hostile actions. He becomes a trickster, appearing both good and evil. Or he may be testing his observers as to who can see through illusions to the truth behind it. The ecstatic critiques the traditional religion by showing its limits and the absurdity of social norms, but he also supports it by both being a part of it and illustrating the dangers involved in leaving traditional behavior." *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 250–51. This book describes the activities and orientations of various devotional ecstatics in Bengali *bhakti* and provides an interesting analysis in terms of their roles as teacher, saint, lover, and madman.
33. Feuerstein, *Holy Madness*, 44–47. In his account of the life of Drukpa Kunley, Feuerstein is relying primarily on K. Dowman, *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley* (Clearlake, Calif.: Dawn Horse Press, 1983).
34. Feuerstein, *Holy Madness*, 47.
35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 216.
37. Ibid., 84.
38. Ibid., 239.
39. See Michael Washburn's books for a most interesting transpersonal theory that analyzes in some depth the complicated dynamics of the personal and prepersonal elements relevant to mystic transformation. *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) and *Transpersonal Psychology in Psychoanalytic Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).
40. Washburn, *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*, 123.
41. Ibid., esp. 120–25, 81–83.
42. This is a theory proposed by R.C. Zaehner, as an aspect of his provocative interpretation of Jungian psychology, which he develops in his analysis of mysticism. See *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), esp. 43–44, 78, 102.
43. Anonymous, *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism,* translated by Robert A. Powell (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1985), 156. See 152–63 for a fascinating development of the dangers of ego-inflation in mysticism. My thanks to Bonnie Schrack, who brought to my attention the relevance of this section to my argument here.
44. Anonymous, *Meditations on the Tarot*, 155.
45. Washburn, *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*, 124.
46. Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature*, 78.
47. Anthony, et al., *Spiritual Choices*, 167–68. See this book for a variety of interesting discussions and theories concerning problems that can arise in the guru-student relationship.
48. Richard H. Jones makes this point with regard to the *bodhisattva*, in outlining the view given in Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932): "the skilled means used to end the suffering of others could involve a *bodhisattva* in violating any norm of the standard Buddhist code of conduct (while still living free from any consequences). This "holy cunning" could involve adopting objectionable modes of livelihood, lying, stealing (to deprive robbers and kings of ill-gotten gains which would lead them to their ruin), having sex with an unmarried woman (to prevent her from harboring thoughts of hatred and ill-will), and even killing a person who intends to murder a Buddhist monk or his own parents. Such actions may redefine *bodhisattvas* as exemplars of virtue, *but the concern is still moral:* they are willing to do anything to help others and are as concerned with the perpetrators as with their victims." *Mysticism Examined*, 198 (my emphasis).
49. Adi Da, *The Knee of Listening*, 200 (my emphasis).
50. See Stoeber, *Theo-Monistic Mysticism: A Hindu-Christian Comparison*. This development in the third section of this chapter is dependent somewhat on illustrations and arguments in this book.
51. Sri Aurobindo Ghose, *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, in *Birth Centenary Library* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1971), 26:426.
52. Ibid., 26:427.
53. Blessed Jan Van Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, translated by Eric Colledge (Westminister, Md.: Christian Classics, 1983), 147.
54. Ibid., 136.
55. Louis Dupré, "The Christian Experience of Mystical Union," *Journal of Religion* 69, no.1 (1989): 9.
56. Jacob Boehme, *The Highly Precious Gate of the Divine Intuition,* in *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, translated by John Rolleston Earle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958) 4.4–5. As quoted in Stoeber, *Theo-Monistic Mysticism*, 75.
57. See Donald Evans, "Can Philosophers Limit What Mystics Can Do? A Critique of Steven Katz," *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 57–58, where he speaks in this regard of "transparent" and "translucent" mysticisms.
58. My thanks to Bill Barnard, Bill Dinges, Don Evans, Glenn Friesen, Donna Freitas, Jeff Kripal, Alexandra Schmidl, and Bonnie Schrack, all of whom provided constructive suggestions that I incorporated into this essay.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Dance of Masks: The Esoteric Ethics of Frithjof Schuon

by Hugh B. Urban

TO MOST AMERICAN readers and students of religion, Frithjof Schuon is known primarily as a rather prolific and erudite, though not entirely respected, scholar of comparative religions who has written more than thirty books, now published into a dozen languages. Best known as an advocate of the "Perennial Philosophy" (*sophia perennis*), Schuon has argued throughout his works for the ultimate unity of all religions and the presence of a common esoteric core within all orthodox traditions. His admirers have included not only a large New Age and occult following, but also a number of respected scholars of religion, such as Huston Smith, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Victor Danner, and Joseph Epes Brown.[1]

In October 1991, however, a body of evidence was brought to light that revealed a very different, more disturbing side of Schuon. A former close disciple, Mark Koslow, made public a series of personal testimonies, photographs, and other documents demonstrating that Schuon had organized a rather unusual religious community at his home in Bloomington, Indiana. Although ostensibly begun as a traditional Sufi order, Schuon's community progressively grew into an eccentric religious synthesis, combining a variety of Eastern religions, apocalyptic imagery, esoteric sexual practices, and a great deal of symbolism drawn from Native American traditions. At the center of the community was a form of ritual dance, based primarily on the Sun Dance of the Oglala Sioux—though fairly radically reinterpreted through Schuon's metaphysical system. Indeed, by synthesizing the Sun Dance with Islamic mysticism and Tantric sexual yoga, Schuon professed to have revealed the universal core of all religions. His dance was supposed to have symbolized nothing less than the Divine Self (*Ātman*)—the sacred Center or Sun at the hub of all existence—that lies motionless amid the transient "play of masks" of the phenomenal world *(Māyā*), represented by the Circle of naked dancers.[2] Finally, he declared this ritual to be the quintessence of all the world's spiritual traditions, now manifest by God as the last revelation for the end

of the world.[3] The group was disbanded on 15 October 1991, after Schuon (then eighty-four years old) was indicted on charges of sexual battery and child molestation in connection with these ritual dances. Because of certain legal technicalities, however, the case was dropped and the charges were never actually proven (see Appendix A).[4]

Although Schuon was never legally convicted of anything, Koslow's testimonies have served to "unmask" much of Schuon's elaborate philosophical system and to reveal some of the less noble motivations that lay behind it. Of course, coming as they do from a former disciple, Koslow's accounts must be regarded with a certain amount of suspicion; it would seem, however, that there is more than enough corroborating evidence—including a huge number of photographs, texts written by present and former disciples, court documents, and other firsthand testimonies—to support most of his descriptions of the Schuon group (see Appendix B).

In this chapter I critically analyze the complex relations between Schuon's mystical life, his metaphysical system, and his rather unique ethical (or supraethical) ideals. Schuon's mystical and ethical system, as discussed below, is grounded in a fundamental distinction between two levels of knowledge and spiritual authority—the exoteric and the esoteric, or the "kernel and the husk." The former is the conventional, mundane level of ordinary humankind, while the latter is the transcendent, suprahuman, and supraethical level of the elite, initiated few, who have the proper intellectual qualifications to perceive the inner Truth. Conventional morality applies only to the outward, exoteric level of truth—a level that, Schuon insists, is necessary to the survival of genuine "Traditional" civilization. For the true "Gnostic" or "Intellectual" man, however, the moral guidelines that bind other men can be left behind, suspended, even violated and transgressed, in the blinding light of Supreme Truth.[5]

As such, Schuon's esoteric ethic is not unlike that of the Indian system of Advaita Vedānta or nondual monistic metaphysics (a tradition from which Schuon drew much inspiration). As Paul Hacker has convincingly argued, the original Advaita Vedānta system is in fact quite unconcerned with "ethics" or conventional morality, which belong only to the limited realm of unenlightened, ordinary human existence. Because "all vital and conditional features were strictly excluded from the universal one and banished to the realm of the unreal," there is in fact no structural basis for action. Thus, morality can at best serve as a "remote preparation" on the path to pure Consciousness.[6] So too, for Schuon, ethical action belongs solely to the exoteric and largely deluded human realm—a realm that is utterly shattered in the inner experience of the Supreme Self, beyond all dualities of good and evil, pure and impure.[7]

Schuon's rather eccentric reinterpretation of the Sun Dance appears to have served as the ritual representation of his mystical and ethical ideals. Based on the fundamental symbolism of the center and periphery, the central tree and the

outer circle of dancers, the Sun Dance embodied Schuon's ideal of the dialectical movement between the exoteric and the esoteric, the outer and the inner; and Schuon himself, standing as the innermost fixed point and axis of this circular dance, thus embodied the still point of divine union and mystical ecstasy beyond the illusory play of "Māyā" represented by the naked dancing women spinning around him.

Finally, I show that Schuon's life and work also demonstrate in an especially poignant way just how religious scholarship and the comparative study of religion can become entangled with sociopolitical and religious ideologies. Indeed, Schuon is among the most extreme examples of a tendency seen in other scholars of religion, such as Georges Dumézil—namely, the subtle use of comparative religious scholarship to support the social and ideological views of the scholar himself.[8] In many ways, Schuon's scholarship is itself a kind of "play of masks" (the title of his recent book) that at the same time serves to legitimate, and yet subtly conceal, his own deeper sociopolitical ideals and his own quest for esoteric power.

After briefly summarizing Schuon's metaphysical doctrine and his own personal life and religious community, I look closely at Schuon's own rather idiosyncratic ritual dance (the "Primordial Gathering") and its sociopolitical implications. Finally, I conclude with some broader reflections on Schuon's unique fusion of religious scholarship with sociopolitical ideology and the larger question of the interrelations between ethics, esotericism, and our own scholarly study of mysticism.

The Mask and the Man: Schuon's Philosophy, Life, and Religious Community

> *I am not a man like other men.*—Frithjof Schuon, *Memories and Meditations*

According to Frithjof Schuon, the term "metaphysic" is only properly used in the singular;[9] as he argues throughout his many published works on comparative religion, there is only one true philosophical and theological view of reality, and this same view is implicit within all of the world's religious traditions. Hence his doctrine is nothing less than the *sophia perennis* or "Primordial Tradition," the eternal Truth that has been revealed throughout human history by various prophets and avatārs. Upon closer examination, however, it appears that Schuon's "metaphysic" is essentially a selective combination of Neoplatonism, Advaita Vedānta, and Islamic mysticism. Much of his system is derived from his predecessors, the great advocates of "Traditionalism" and the "Perennial Philosophy," René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and the Italian Fascist-metaphysician, Julius Evola[10]—although Schuon has presented this system in its most articulate and popular form. He has in effect constructed a rather ingenious synthetic frame-

work through which he attempts to interpret all of the world's religious faiths, from Christianity to Buddhism to the American Indians.

The principles of this metaphysical framework are essentially twofold. First, "vertically," it is based on the principle of hierarchy—a strongly Neoplatonic chain of Being that descends in a graded progression from the Divine Unity to the conditioned world of multiplicity and illusion.[11] At the peak of his great metaphysical pyramid, there is the Absolute Reality, the One or Divine Essence, which is comprised of infinite consciousness, being, and bliss (the Vedāntic *sat, cit, ānanda*). This Absolute Reality is identical in all religious traditions, known variously as the God of the Abrahamic religions, the *brahman* of the Hindus, the *śūnyatā* of the Buddhists, the *Wakan Tanka* of the American Indians, and so on. This Absolute Reality desires to manifest itself in a form outside itself, however, and therefore it creates the descending levels of Being. Essentially, this chain of Being is based on a tripartite hierarchy. Beginning from the Personal God and his creative Logos, the hierarchy descends in a succession of: (1) the Ideal or heavenly plane; (2) the astral or psychic plane; and (3) our own physical world, composed of time and space. The same tripartite hierarchy structures the whole of creation, including (as noted below) society, religious traditions, and even the human body itself.[12]

Second, "horizontally," this metaphysical system is based on the principle of "Center and Periphery" or alternatively, "esoteric and exoteric."[13] Everything in Schuon's universe has an inside and outside, a "kernel" and a "husk," such that every phenomenal appearance in this material world is actually only a symbol pointing to some higher spiritual reality. Everything visible is only *Māyā*—a "play of masks" or veil, behind which is hidden the inner truth. One must have the discerning power of the "Intellect" or the "Eye of Gnosis" to penetrate this illusory play of the periphery, to discover the true Self (*Ātman*) at the motionless Center of all things.[14]

Every religious tradition, therefore, also has an inner and an outer dimension: the latter is the periphery, the "husk" or the letter, which is composed of the rituals, commandments, dogmas or sacraments that make up an orthodox religious tradition. This is essentially the realm of ethical norms and moral prohibitions. But the inner dimension is the true mystical Center, the inner path that leads directly to union with the Divine. Ultimately, this inner esoteric kernel is one and the same in all religious faiths—though it is represented in various forms, such as the esoteric schools of Sufism, the Kabbalah, certain forms of Christian mysticism, Advaita Vedānta, Tantra, or the secret knowledge of Native American holy men. In his writings at least, Schuon insists that the exoteric dimension is absolutely necessary as a preliminary or protective covering for the esoteric essence, and that it cannot simply be dispensed with or bypassed. Nevertheless, for the chosen few who are capable of penetrating beyond the "husk" to the true kernel, such outward forms, symbolic rituals, and even the most fundamental ethical standards can be transcended and, indeed, shattered or contradicted:

> [T]he relationship between exoterism and esoterism is equivalent to the relationship between "form and spirit." . . . The spirit . . . always displays a tendency to breach its formal limitations, thereby putting itself in apparent contradiction with them.[15]

> Religion is like a walnut . . . with both a shell and the core . . . which can grow and possess existence only within the shell. The purpose of the shell is the protect the fruit. . . . The final end of religion is to guide man to God, to enable man to be delivered from the bondage of limitation which is the goal of esoterism.[16]

Schuon himself freely admits that this is an *elitist* view of religion: the highest truth is meant only for the few, the initiates who have the intellectual abilities to transcend the outer forms of the masses. Of course, the inner core or center of every human being is ultimately identical, being one with the Absolute Reality itself; but only a select few have the qualifications to transcend the exoteric world—the "mask"—and penetrate this inner Truth: "the esoteric way can only concern a minority, especially under the present conditions of humanity."[17]

As might be expected, Schuon's metaphysical system has very direct and unambiguous sociopolitical implications. Because the entire universe, from the heights of the Absolute Reality to the lowest depths of the material world, is based on a hierarchical order, so too is the authentic human society. Schuon in fact devoted an entire book to this subject, *Castes et Races,*[18] which staunchly defends the great ideological and sociopolitical establishments of the world's religions: the Hindu caste system, the medieval monarchies, the sacral kingships of ancient cultures, the differences between the races, as well as the superiority of men over women—all of these, he believes, are inscribed within the very fabric of the universe. They are based on a kind of "divine geometry" or "mathematical symmetry" that makes up the cosmos, both natural and social; for the true social order, like the metaphysical order, is "vertical and hierarchical, not horizontal and neutral."[19] Perhaps the clearest and most complete expression of this metaphysical ideology is the Hindu tripartite model of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas. These basic castes, he suggests, are not simply "institutional" structures, but in fact correspond to "natural castes," that is, structures inherent in the order of the cosmos:

> The anthropology of India, which is at once spiritual and social, distinguishes on one hand between human beings who . . . are situated on three different levels (*brahmana, kshatriya*, *vaishya*), and on the other hand between the totality of human beings and those who, not having a center, are homogenous (*shudra, chandala,* or *panchama*). . . . But it is natural castes, not institutional castes that we are speaking of here.[20]

Indeed, in Schuon's eyes, it is precisely the rebellion against this ideal social order that is "the most pernicious form of ideological subversion," leading to the destruction of civilizations and so to the present crisis in modern Western society.[21]

The same tripartite structure is inscribed in every level of the cosmos, including the human being—who is composed of body, soul, and spirit (*hyle, psyche, pneuma*)—and the physical body—which is constructed of the three strata of the head, torso, and genitals. "In man alone is the head freed from the body so as to dominate it like the Spirit dominating chaos."[22] Schuon was well read in the ancient Indo-European anthropological and cosmological hierarchies, such as the Vedic archetype of Puruṣa, or Plato's hierarchy of the ideal state, which are based on metaphysical ideologies of the Body. For Schuon, as for Plato, "proper hierarchy—within society and within the individual—is vertical and pyramidic . . . the top section should control the lower two, prevailing over them by its superior mental powers."[23] The ideal hierarchy of society is literally inscribed in the nature of the human body and soul.

Because all reality is based on the distinction between the "esoteric" and the "exoteric," so too is the authentic social order. In every society, there is always a great majority of the exoteric masses, the "profane" (to whom he refers, in his *Memories and Meditations,* as "the animal-like somnambulistic subjection of prattlers, who . . . fill the world with their dull buzzing, babbling stupidity"[24]) and only a small number of chosen esoteric individuals, the intellectuals or gnostics. The esoteric individual must initially begin by following the laws and prescriptions of society, which serve as a kind of "celestial illusion" or a "skillful means" in Buddhist terms—that is, a limited aid to higher truth. But he must eventually transcend them, taking leave of all exoteric rules at the higher plane of inner gnosis. Indeed, if his intention is just, the esoteric man can willfully break the laws and commandments of the exoteric social order. For example, certain initiatic groups, like the Indian Tantrics, can knowingly defy the orthodox Hindu laws of caste, food taboos, and sex, because they are guided by a higher gnosis and motivated by a soteriological intention. For such men, "outward observances are a formalism that is superfluous."[25]

In short, one may say that Schuon's ideology is a double-edged sword: on one hand, it legitimates a sociopolitical structure based on rigid hierarchy and caste; on the other hand, it also legitimates the higher power of the esoteric man, the "gnostic" or "knower," who has the knowledge to transcend this same hierarchical order. As noted below, these two elements became the twin pillars of Schuon's own religious community and ritual dances.

The New Civilization: Schuon's Life, Mystical Experiences, and Religious Community

According to those who knew him, Schuon's personal life would appear to be every bit as eclectic and syncretistic as his own metaphysical and philosophical

teachings. As a true Renaissance man and an embodiment of the *Religio Perennis*, Schuon claimed not only to be a Sufi Shaykh and a scholar of comparative religion, but also a member of the Oglala Sioux, a Vedāntic metaphysician, a Platonic logician, a painter, a poet, a visionary, and, ultimately, even a prophet or *avatār*. I suggest, however, that his writings were not only a kind of mask, which concealed a very eccentric old man, but his works and his knowledge of the world's religions also served to legitimate his own sociopolitical agenda, his religious community, and ultimately his own messianic claims.[26]

Born in Basel, Switzerland, in 1907, Schuon was from his youth a restless traveler and a staunch individualist.[27] After quitting his "rigid and lifeless" schooling at the age of sixteen, Schuon worked briefly as a textile maker, wandered widely through Europe and joined the French army for about a year. In the 1930s Schuon began to develop what was to become a life-long passion for Islamic culture, which led him to travel throughout Algeria, North Africa, and later into India. Eventually, in 1932, Schuon claims to have been initiated into a Sufi order in Algeria; he pursued the Sufi path fervently for several years, and finally asked his aged Shaykh to bestow upon him the *maqqadam*-ship—that is, the mantle of initiation, which would make him the next Shaykh. His master refused. Shortly thereafter, however, Schuon claims to have received a message directly from God, reversing his master's decision, and naming him Shaykh. According to Rama Coomaraswamy, the personal physician to Schuon (and son of the Indian Art Historian, Ananda), "Schuon was refused *maqqadam*-ship but claimed to have received the right to be Shaykh by the direct intervention of God—hence a Shaykh *al-barrakah*."[28]

Next to Islam, Schuon's second great love was the religions of the Native Americans. Indeed, he saw in them one of the last vestiges of the "primordial man"—that is, the human culture that is closest to the original state of innocence and unfallen Paradise. Most of Schuon's knowledge of the Native Americans appears to have come through his friend Joseph Epes Brown, who visited the famous Oglala holy man, Black Elk, and wrote the well-known book *The Sacred Pipe.* In 1959 Schuon visited the reservations of South Dakota and Montana; upon his return in 1963, he claims to have been adopted into both the Crow and the Oglala tribes, where he received the name of "Bright Star" (*Wichipi Wayakpa*).[29] He subsequently wrote a book on Native American spirituality, *The Feathered Sun*, that professed to explicate its true metaphysical essence and to demonstrate its deeper unity with the other world's religious traditions (although his version of Native American beliefs bears a striking resemblance to Hindu Vedānta[30]). As shown below, Schuon's life-long interest in the Native American became the basis for his own religious order and his "Primordial Gatherings."

Throughout his life Schuon claims to have had a number of intense visionary experiences that he believed gave him a direct insight into the essence of all religions. Most of these centered around Madonna figures, and many of them

involved explicit sexual imagery, focused primarily on the female genitalia. They include: the Virgin Mary, the Sioux Buffalo Cow Woman, the Buddhist Goddess Tārā, the Hindu Goddess Kālī, and Schuon's own female consort, Sa. Badriyah, appearing as various divine female beings[31] (many of these female figures appear in Schuon's paintings, or "icons" as he called them[32]). The most audacious of these visions is undoubtedly his vision of the Virgin Mary, which occurred in 1964 during his trip to Morocco. As he records the experience, he felt himself to be the naked infant born from her womb:

> On my way to Morocco in 1964, when I was suffering from asthma and feeling ill to the point of death . . . there occurred . . . the contact with the Blessed Virgin. This had as its result the irresistible urge to be naked like her little child. From this time onwards I went naked as often as possible . . . later this mystery came upon me again . . . with the irresistible awareness that I am not a man like other men.[33]

According to Sa. Aminah, one of his four wives and closest disciples, this was not merely an experience of "birth," but in fact a kind of sexual union with the "Virgin" [!] herself:

> God sent him a grace that had to do with the sexual parts of the Virgin. . . . She appeared inside him and touched him on the inside. There was something erotic about it. She appeared inside of him. . . . He felt her inside.[34]

In any case, based on the numerous documents from the Bloomington community, both Schuon and his disciples appear to have believed that this experience of union with and/or birth from the Virgin Mary proved his identity with Jesus Christ.[35]

The second most important of Schuon's visionary experiences, and the one that appears most often in his paintings, is that of the Buffalo Cow Woman of the Sioux.[36] As mentioned above, Schuon was fascinated with the American Indians from an early age, regarding them as representatives of "primordial man," before the "fall" into civilization. He seems to have had a particular interest in the mythic figure of Pte-San-Win, the Buffalo Woman, who is believed to have brought the sacred pipe and the ritual of the Sun Dance to the Sioux. According to the traditional narrative, two Lakota men encountered a mysterious and beautiful buffalo woman, completely naked, with long black hair. Filled with desire, the first young man wished to "embrace" her but was subsequently destroyed and reduced to bones. The second, however, approached her with humility and was then granted the sacred pipe, the most holy object of the Sioux, and their symbol of the har-

mony of the community and the cosmos.According to Black Elk's account (which was probably the only source that Schuon knew very well), the Buffalo Goddess will eventually return to the Oglalas, in a "second coming" not unlike that of Jesus Christ, which will herald the end of the world: "this White Buffalo Cow Woman, who brought our sacred pipe, will appear again at the end of this world, which we know is not very far off."[37]

Schuon also claimed to have seen the Buffalo Cow Woman in a divine vision and to have been given the sacred pipe. His experience differs rather significantly from the traditional Oglala narrative, however: "Pte-San-win . . . the Buffalo Cow Woman of the Sioux who brought the sacred pipe to the Indians . . . was in the Mihrab (of a mosque). She was naked and he rose up with her, embracing, into the air."[38] This mystical-sexual experience is also depicted throughout Schuon's paintings, many of which portray Pte-San-Win spread legged with pubic hair shaved, kneeling or lying down.[39] Here we seem to have a rather bizarre mixture of Schuon's own erotic fantasies, his visions of the Virgin and the Buffalo Cow Woman—all within the setting of a Mosque. Yet, as Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy points out, "in the traditional story of Pte-san-win, the man who desired sexual union with her is reduced to ashes,"[40] whereas here, in his erotic embrace with the Goddess, Schuon realizes a supreme deification.

Schuon's experiences of the Buffalo Cow Woman were especially significant for the development of his community and its ritual practices. As the divine being who brought the Sun Dance, the sacred pipe, and the other ceremonies to the Oglalas, the Buffalo Goddess offered a source of legitimation and authority for Schuon's own secret rites. In fact, as shown below, this very myth was acted out during Schuon's own Primordial Gatherings. At the same time, Schuon was certainly aware of Black Elk's statement that "this White Buffalo Cow Woman . . . will appear again at the end of this world . . . which is not very far off," and it appears that he regarded his own vision of the Goddess as evidence that this second coming was at hand.

Schuon's remarkable visionary experiences appear to have filled him not only with a sense of divine inspiration or even divination, but also with a sense of cosmic purpose and mission. Although denied *maqqadam*-ship by his own Sufi Shaykh, he believed himself to have been chosen directly by God to found a new order of a purely esoteric and universalistic nature.

In 1980 Schuon was invited by Professor Victor Danner of the University of Indiana to move to and live permanently in the United States. Shortly after his arrival, he then organized his "*tariqa*" or Sufi order at his large home in a rural area outside of Bloomington, and he began to conduct regular sacred gatherings (*majlis*) for the invocation of the Divine Name (*dhikr*). The membership of this group was always quite restricted and, by Schuon's own admission, elitist: it consisted almost entirely of upper- and upper-middle-class whites, mostly from the Midwest area, with some European members. Most came from

a nominal Christian background, and virtually all had a high level of education (primarily college-graduate or higher, with a significant number of academics).[41] For the first several years, at least, the *tariqa* appears to have roughly followed a traditional Islamic model, to have observed most of the laws of orthodox Muslim faith, and to have maintained a relatively low profile.

Schuon, however, structured his religious community in a very specific way: he patterned it after the tripartite metaphysical system, which he believed was the archetypal structure both of the cosmos and the true social order. Following the classical model of the Hindu caste system, he divided his order into three grades: the "outer circle" of more than one hundred novices; the "inner circle" of fifty to sixty initiates; and finally the select group of the thirty most intimate disciples (the "Thabitids and Haggids") and Schuon's four wives. These grades were explicitly identified with the gnostic classification of the *hylic*, *psychic,* and *pneumatic* types of human being, and with the Hindu castes of *vaishya, kshatriya,* and *brahmana*. Mark Koslow speculates, however, that Schuon—like other exponents of "Traditionalism" and "Perennialism," such as Julius Evola—may also have been influenced by the European nationalist and racist mythologies from the early twentieth century. He hoped to realize nothing short of a New World Order—what Schuon often referred to as a "New Civilization"—within his own group in Bloomington:

> Schuon's theory of castes and races is not without relation to the European racist theories common at the turn of the century . . . which found a form in Hitler's master race. Schuon's theory of caste-race determines his judgment of people . . . people are classified according to the Hindu theory: priestly type, warrior type, merchant type, manual laborer, caste-less "candala." . . . Schuon's theory of caste constitutes a practical application of his anthropology and . . . defines the hierarchy of the *tariqa* which places Schuon at the top.[42]

Although his own community was founded on the ideal tripartite social structure, Schuon appears to have considered himself to be utterly beyond all outward religious forms, orthodox religious ceremonies, or observances. He had ascended to the level of "pure esoterism." Indeed, he appears to have regarded himself no longer even as a "man like other men," but rather as a divine being. According to Mary Ann Danner, a former devotee, Schuon "believes himself to be a . . . divine incarnation and above any sacred law."[43] His disciples clearly believed him to be nothing less than a prophet or *avatār*—or, even more boldly, the greatest of all prophets, the last Avatār, manifested to the world clearly at the end of time. According to a long hymnlike litany written by his one of his wives, entitled "The Veneration of the Shaykh," "how can one doubt that one is faced with an Avatāric phenomenon, or with a prophetic figure, or with a great bodhisattva . . . a spiritual manifestation of

great import?"[44] He is praised as a manifestation of the eternal "Logos," or Universal principle of revelation in all religions, who therefore possesses

> the qualities of Shiva and Krishna . . . the affinity with the primordial and the Red Indian, the providential connection with Sayyidatna Maryam . . . Abraham, David, Christ and Muhammad. . . . The different faces of the Logos reverberate in the Shaykh.[45]

In short he is the sacred "Center which unites every spoke," the central hub of the great cosmic dance that is the universe.[46]

In the last few years of his community's existence, Schuon's sociopolitical ideology and messianic tendencies began to merge, assuming an even more central role—indeed, they appear to have given birth to an almost millenarian or apocalyptic fervor. Like Guénon before him, Schuon's writings have always been replete with severe diatribes against modern Western society, with "the most relentless and scathing criticisms of the modern world to be found anywhere."[47] The modern West is nothing less than "luciferian," "rotten to the core," and a "monstrosity," because of its turn away from the true "primordial tradition" and its progressive movement away from the "Divine Center."[48] But this is only an inevitable result of the descending movement of history itself, which has gradually degenerated until our own most corrupt age, the Kali Yuga. We are now fast approaching the end of this cosmic cycle, when the world shall be consumed in the final conflagration of the Divine Justice and the Messiah shall return for the final judgment of all things. According to the disciples that Messiah is none other than Schuon himself. "It is like a revelation of mysteries at the end of time," proclaims his wife and closest disciple. "He is not just an Avatāra, but a new category that has never existed before; He represents pure metaphysics, the primordial religion, the quintessence of all religions"; indeed, Schuon has called himself "the instrument for the manifestation of the *Religio Perennis* at the end of time."[49] As the Divine Logos, he has now descended to earth for the end of the world, to reveal the ultimate goal of all history—the transcendent unity of religions and the foundation of a New World Order, of which he is the Prophet. As Koslow comments:

> His theory of history . . . defines history as leading up to Schuon. . . . Schuon's theory of caste and race, combined with his creation of a "New Civilization" (as he calls his *tariqa*) and combined with his politics, result in social manipulation and demagoguery.[50]

Schuon strove throughout his life to realize what he believed to be a divine vision—not only a metaphysical vision of the structure and unity of all religions, but also a messianic vision of a new "universal religion." Hoping to recreate and

actualize his vision, Schuon organized his own religion, and perhaps his own New Civilization, of which he himself was the prophet. In order to enforce his power, to express his rejection of the modern Western world, and to build his own religious community, he turned to the ritual dance.

The "Primordial Dance": The Sun Dance and Schuon's "Primordial Gatherings"

> *Nudity and dance: life toward the inward. Nudity is radiating consciousness of Being. . . . [N]udity is a form of childlikeness.*—Frithjof Schuon, "Sacred Nudity"

> *My love was the gentle ring which circled caressing,*
> *around your body, like a round dance.*
> *And you displayed your body*
> *before me, on dark mosses spread out,*
> *heavily breathing like a wild animal*
> *And your breasts proudly expanded and*
> *you were not a woman any longer, but a*
> *golden mirror in which a God sees himself.*
> *. . . becoming eternal, I merge into you.*
> —Frithjof Schuon, "Krishna and Radha"

The core of Schuon's community in Bloomington was a specific ritual that involved invocation and dance—what he called the "Primordial Gatherings." Within these secret rites the historian of religions will recognize a number of different influences at work—the Sufi *dhikr*, Indian Tantra, along with various Eastern forms of dance, derived loosely from India, Bali, and the Middle East. The single most important element in this syncretistic blend, however, is the Sun Dance of the Oglala Sioux, for it is this above all that Schuon regards as the ritual of the "primordial man." Indeed, Schuon claims not only to have been adopted as a member of the Sioux, but to have personally received their holiest secrets, including that of the Sun Dance.

Among the Oglala Sioux, the Sun Dance (*wiwanyag wachipi*) is often called the greatest of all ceremonies.[51] Typically held in July or August, it is the principal ceremony of the year, serving "as an opportunity for the people to renew their faith and for men to demonstrate their power of endurance," and ultimately, as a "celebration of life for the welfare of the whole world."[52] The format of the Sun Dance is divided into four days of ritual—three for the preparations of the dancers and the dance ground, and one for the dance itself. After the purification of the dancers in the sweat lodge and the smoking of the sacred pipe (*calumet*), the participants ceremonially cut the forked cottonwood tree (*wagachun*), which will serve as the central post of the ritual. Around this central tree, a special lodge is

constructed in the shape of a circular enclosure with an opening to the east; this is made up of twenty-eight vertical posts, the roof beams of which join together at the central post. With each of its twenty-eight posts representing some element of physical creation, and each corresponding to the twenty-eight days of the lunar month, this lodge represents "the universe in a likeness," the great cycle of both space and time.[53] Inside its circular space, the sacred power of the Sun is focused and concentrated, symbolizing the power of *Wakan,* which "enlightens the whole universe" and "by which all creatures are enlightened."[54]

During the actual performance of the ritual, the dancers bind themselves to this pole with braided thongs, piercing the muscles of the shoulders or breast. To the accompaniment of a drum, some men dance around the pole until the thongs rip through the flesh; others hang suspended until the flesh tears; some drag buffalo skulls; and a few engage in the most painful dance, standing tied between four poles, and dancing slowly until he tears himself free.[55] When his flesh is pierced, and when he abases himself with suffering and crying, the dancer is said to be so "pitiful" that the compassionate spirits infuse him with new power. And when he is then tied to the center, at the meeting point of the four directions, he himself is joined with the sacred Center of the entire universe.[56] Finally, when he tears his flesh, he symbolizes the breaking free of the "bonds of the flesh," the spirit's transcendence of the material world and ignorance; at the same time he also enacts the perfect self-sacrifice of the individual for the sake of the community, and ultimately, for the entire world.[57] After this difficult ordeal, pieces of the flesh are placed at the foot of the center pole as an offering to *Wakan Tanka* for the sake of obtaining certain benefits—healing, good hunting, success in battle, or personal power. At the end of the ritual, once they have passed through this intense suffering, the dancers temporarily have a gift of "healing power," a sacred strength, which they may communicate to cure the sick.[58] Finally, the ritual concludes with the burning of all the sacred objects upon the altar, the purification of the dancers in the sweat lodge, and a final gathering for feasting and smoking the sacred pipe.

Through its rich symbolic organization and powerful ritual drama, the Sun Dance has been able to fulfill a number of different roles, responding to a variety of different needs among the Sioux: as a response to the oppression and misery of the Native American, providing "meaning amidst an otherwise meaningless and unjust world";[59] as a powerful affirmation of collective identity, ethnic pride, and "independence from white power";[60] and finally, as a source of personal power, authority, and a new identity to the individual dancer, who is said to transcend his own ordinary existence and to tap into all the powers of the spirit world.[61]

From his reading of Neihardt and Brown, and from his own travels among the Native Americans, Schuon was well aware of these elements of cosmic symbolism, cultural resistance, and personal power within the Sun Dance religion. In

fact, he appears to have made the Native American into a symbol of his own ideological program: the Native American represents both the "primordial man" closest to the state of Paradise, as well as the noble opponent of Western decadence and materialism. Hence the Native American religion is symbolic of "primordial Nature," which will one day again be victorious over the "evil" of this "sacrilegious Western civilization":

> Nature is a necessary support for the Indian tradition. . . . The crushing of the Red Indian is tragic because the Red man could only conquer or die. . . . This confers on the destiny of the Red race an aspect of grandeur and martyrdom. . . . The great drama might be defined as the struggle, not only between a materialist civilization and another that was . . . spiritual, but also between urban civilization (in the strictly human and evil sense . . .) and the kingdom of Nature. . . . From this idea of the final victory of Nature the Indians . . . draw their patience. . . . Nature, of which they feel themselves embodiments . . . will end by conquering this artificial and sacrilegious world.[62]

The dance always held a central place, both in Schuon's thought and in his personal life. Indeed, Schuon even suggests that the dance (above all, the nude dance) is the highest, most esoteric form of worship, the supreme form of "prayer," which involves the entire body and which is engaged in "without thought." This supreme prayer, he believed, had been revealed to him directly from God. Early in life, he claims to have had a vision of the true nature of the prophet Muhammad, who appeared to him as a constellation of six stars. These six stars represented what Schuon later called the "Six Themes," or six stages of contemplation that accompany the invocation of the Divine Name (*dhikr*):[63] fear of God, faith, mercy, love, annihilation, and union. The last two of these—annihilation and divine union—are made available only to advanced disciples through initiation. Beyond even these highest two levels, however, there is also another, still more esoteric Seventh Theme, which is none other than "the sacred dance and nudity." As Schuon declares, "Nudity and dance: life toward the inward . . . nudity is a form of childlikeness"; indeed, "nudity separates us from the world by setting us apart: the completely naked man stands . . . above human society; he is clad . . . in heavenly glory."[64] The naked dance is the most perfect form of invocation, for it makes the entire body into a prayer of the Divine Name. As the "most esoteric way of prayer," beyond all the "exoteric forms" of outward religious observances, it allows one to "dance like an Indian"—that is, like a "primordial man," in a state of innocence and naked purity. As Sa. Aminah writes, in a series of directions intended for the most advanced initiates:

> The seventh theme is the sacred dance and nudity. It is a non-thinking existential Invocation. It is contemplation of beauty and participation (as on Indian Day). . . . Tantra is bodily Invocation. . . . It is completely non-confessional, *therefore we dance like Indians*. I do not ask myself what I think, I only am.[65]

But Schuon's metaphysical vision could only be fully realized, it appears, in the form of a communal dance—what he called the "Primordial Gatherings." The origins of these gatherings go back to the 1950s in Switzerland, but they really only developed into full-scale rituals after Schuon moved to the United States and settled in Bloomington. In the beginning, the gatherings actually started out as fairly traditional Sufi meetings (*majlis*), for the communal invocation of the Divine Name (*dhikr*). In the 1980s, however, these meetings became increasingly less traditional and more eclectic, gradually evolving into a complex melding of Islamic, American Indian (Sioux), and Hindu symbolism.[66]

Above all, Schuon appears to have patterned his gatherings specifically after the Sun Dance of the Oglalas.[67] As the ideal symbol of "primordial man," the human culture that is closest to the original state of unfallen nature and "*childlikeness*," the Sun Dance became the ideal medium for the expression of his own metaphysical and social vision. Schuon also added a great deal of his own creative innovations, however, combining Sufi *dhikr* with nude women, sexual contact, Indian drums, feathered war-bonnets, and special Indian-style costumes (tailored to expose the genitals), among other highly untraditional elements. And he then adapted these various symbols to his own metaphysical hierarchy and his ideal social order.

Like most everything else in Schuon's system, his primordial dances were divided into three grades, corresponding to three levels of his followers. Each of these dances, moreover, was performed with different degrees of nudity, symbolizing the progressive unveiling of the divine and the move toward the "esoteric." All of the gatherings took place in a kind of "Indian lodge," a circular wooden construction, roughly patterned after the Sun Dance lodge as described by Black Elk, and set up in the yard behind the group's residence. At the center stood a straight pole, presumably the *Wakan*-tree, and a low stool, where Schuon himself always sat. Within this lodge, the first grade of the gatherings, or "Indian Days," were arranged semiregularly, primarily for outsiders and novices. At these rituals, Schuon's female disciples performed Indian-style dances wearing fairly modest Indian-style clothing.[68]

Second, there were gatherings for the Inner Circle, a group of fifty to sixty men and women, held approximately once a month. As a more esoteric and "inward" form of ritual, these dances were performed almost entirely nude, with only "slight loin cloths" covering the female dancers.[69] The center of this ritual was a re-creation of the Buffalo Goddess myth, acted out by Schuon's primary

consort, Sa. Badriyah. Indeed, it appears that Schuon believed Sa. Badriyah to have been an incarnation of Pte-San-Win herself—a theme that also appears throughout his paintings, where the two figures are often identified.

> [T]he imitation Sa. Badriyah does of the bringing of the Sacred Pipe (Schuon says Sa. Badriyah is an incarnation of Buffalo-Cow woman) is performed completely naked. . . . Schuon wears an Indian war bonnet . . . and a costume which is a combination loin-cloth and leggings except that his genitals are not covered. . . . [H]is pubic hair is shaved off.[70]

Once the sacred Pipe was revealed by the Buffalo Goddess, the ritual then proceeded with a rather odd combination of the Sufi *dhikr* and Indian dance. Schuon himself was seated at the center of the lodge, smoking the Pipe, and observing the naked dancers who circled around him:

> The Islamic divine Name is recited at the Primordial Gatherings to the accompaniment of the Indian Drum . . . the melody of the song is American Indian, as are the costumes of the fuqara. . . . Schuon smoked the Sacred Pipe in a ritual manner.[71]

It is the third grade of the gatherings, however, that contains the most powerful symbolism and represents the core of Schuon's ideology. Performed completely naked, these dances involved more explicit sexual contact, and they were open only to the most intimate of Schuon's disciples (the Thabitids and Haggids) and Sa. Badriyah. The nature of the ritual dance itself was rather simple: To the accompaniment of drums and singing, Schuon sat at the center of the "Indian lodge" and smoked his pipe, while a circle of thirty naked dancers moved clockwise around him. With his genitals uncovered, Schuon then walked slowly from the center of the circle to the periphery, closely embracing each of the women, "pressing his chest and stomach against the breasts and abdomens of the women" and then returning again to the center.[72] (It was in this ritual that the three young girls were allegedly forced to participate ["nudity and childlikeness," Schuon tells us, are the symbols of the primordial religion].)

Now, in order to understand what Schuon intended these dances to represent, we must examine his published writings as well as the esoteric directions given to his religious community. First of all, in his published works on the Native Americans, Schuon gives a detailed symbolic explanation of the various elements of the dance, seen from the standpoint of his metaphysical system. The smoking of the sacred pipe (the *Calumet*), for example, symbolizes the dissolution and transformation of the individual human being into the Absolute Reality: "the smoke disappearing into space . . . marks the transmutation into the

Formless. . . . [B]y breathing himself out with [the smoke], towards the unlimited, man spreads himself throughout the Divine Space."[73] Similarly, the drum represents "the virile character of the chant," which is "a song of . . . victory over the earth and nostalgia for heaven."[74] And likewise, the Indian headdress, which Schuon wore in all his Primordial Gatherings, is a symbol of the Feathered Sun—one of Schuon's favorite images, which adorns the cover of several of his books and his journal, *Studies in Comparative Religion*. For him, this symbol embodies the central meaning of the Sun Dance, representing the transformation of the human being into a winged spiritual being, and ultimately, into the Luminous Sun itself: man is spiritually transformed into "an eagle soaring toward heaven and becoming identified with the rays of the Divine Luminary."[75] When Schuon donned the headdress during his own rituals, he was not only identifying himself as a "chief or great warrior," but ultimately as one with Divine Sun itself. Indeed, Schuon tells us that the truly awakened individual, the gnostic or Intellectual, realizes the presence of the Divine Sun within his own heart. The true Center of the dance is none other than our own Self (*Ātman*), which is identical with the Divine Sun of *Brahman,* and the dance itself is simply "our union with the Great Spirit." For the "deified man," who has inwardly realized this profound symbolism, "The Sun Dance becomes a permanent inner state . . . in the Heart. The profane separation between ordinary consciousness and the Immanent Sun is eliminated and the person lives . . . in another dimension."[76]

Most important of all, however, is the symbolism of the dancers' movement within the circular dance itself. In his recent work, *The Play of Masks*, Schuon makes this symbolism quite explicit: the circle of female naked dancers symbolizes the phenomenal universe (*Māyā*) or feminine Nature, which ceaselessly revolves as a "play of masks." Like the Sioux Sun Dance lodge, they represent the outer periphery of the circle and the totality of the created universe. Like the Sun Dance lodge, moreover, they also symbolize the cycle of time and the temporal movement of the planets around the Sun.The tree at the center of this circle of dancers is an image of the "deified man," the human being who has realized his own ultimate unity and identity with the Absolute Reality. In relation to the rest of mankind, he is the "pole" and "axis" who gives life and truth to the world. And his centrifugal and centripetal movements from the center to the periphery symbolizes the divine Sun of the Self (*Ātman*), which radiates outward toward the world of illusion (*Māyā*) and then returns again to the Center:

> [T]he Deified Man is central . . . with regard to the multitude of ordinary men. . . . Deified Man plays the part of the Motionless Mover in relation to a human collectivity. . . . An example is the Sun Dance around a tree representing the axis Heaven-Earth. . . . [The dance] refers to the relationship between Ātma and Māyā, . . . the manifestation of diversifying Potentiality and reintegration into original Synthesis.[77]

Going still further, Schuon compares the Sun Dance both to the *rasa-līlā* or great circle dance of Vaishnava bhakti—in which the cowherd maidens dance around the central figure of Lord Krishna—and to the Muslim ritual circumambulation of the Ka'aba. In each case, it is the symbol of the Deified Man at the Center, surrounded by the "play of masks" or illusion of Māyā:

> The play of Krishna with the gopis refers to the masks; but the apparition of his immutable form before Arjuna refers to the divine Substance. This form, reflected in Māyā, assumed in its turn innumerable masks.[78]

> The believers are like the gopis dancing around Krishna and uniting themselves to him; where he—the Motionless Mover—plays the saving flute. . . . As an example of the symbol . . . we shall mention the circumambulation of the Ka'aba.[79]

Read in light of his own published statements, then, Schuon's primordial dance appears to be nothing less than a concrete, ritualized assertion of his own divine status, his identity with the Sun Dance tree, with Krishna, and with the Holy Ka'aba. In short, he has attempted to act out what is written in his own books. In his own metaphysical terms, he has assumed the role of the *Ātman*—which is identical to *Brahman*—as it reflects itself in the realm of *Māyā*—the play of masks, symbolized by the naked dancers who revolve around him in reverent awe.[80]

But the central act of Schuon's rituals was the actual pressing of his naked body closely against that of each individual dancer. When Schuon thrust his own genitals against those of the dancers, he also appears to have been attempting to re-create—in a rather eccentric and idiosyncratic fashion—the central act of the Sun Dance: the "piercing" and "tearing" of the dancers' flesh. In his essay "The Sun Dance," he suggests that when a dancer's flesh is pierced, this is not only a "sacrifice," but also a kind of "impregnation": "The dancer is *impregnated* with Solar Power."[81] In his own esoteric writings intended for disciples, however, he takes this symbolism even further. As he tells us in his essay "Sacred Nudity," the penis symbolizes the Divine masculine "virility," the "Creative principle," which is the Word or Logos; and the Logos is in turn identified as the "sword of the Spirit," the "sharp, two-edged sword of the Word of God, sharp as unto the cleaving asunder of soul and spirit," and which penetrates the veil of *Māyā*.When this sword of the Logos-phallus presses against the female genitals, this symbolizes the "thrust" or "piercing" of the Divine Will into the world of *Māyā*: "The divine virility is thrust upon mankind," Schuon writes.[82] As Koslow comments, "Schuon represents God Himself, whose 'divine virility' is thrust upon and comes into union with the women, who represent Māyā, the receptive substance through which God's potency is manifest."[83]

Finally, Schuon not only assumed the roles of the Sun Dance tree and the Sun itself, but also much of the role of the Sun Dancer, who "sacrifices" himself for the sake of his community. As the "deified man" it is Schuon himself who offers himself for the sake of the world, who brings light, knowledge, and "healing" to his community of disciples and, ultimately, to the whole of mankind. By embracing each of the naked dancers, pressing them against his genitals and grabbing their buttocks, Schuon was supposed to have brought "healing" to them: "from the Center the dancers draw their strength," he explains; "The Central Tree is charged with blessings; the Indians touch it, rub their faces and bodies on it . . . and healings take place."[84] As Koslow summarizes the ritual as explained to him by Schuon's wives, "As the Virgin blessed Schuon with her genitals and healed him so also Schuon blesses these women with his body, healing them."[85] Schuon himself tells us that the union of the penis and the vulva, as enacted in his dance, is a "sacrament," which brings not only healing, but even a form of "deification."[86] Indeed, his disciples take this symbolism a step further still, and appear to identify Schuon with Christ, as the divine being who sacrifices Himself for the whole world: "Schuon's body, like Christ's body, heals people . . . it is identified with the highest Divine Name, the All-holy, as if Schuon were God"; "Schuon's body is like the Eucharist, the women are the receptive souls awaiting his naked body."[87] According to a prayer-hymn that was composed by his wives and regularly sung to him by the disciples of the inner circle:

> O Isa, son of Mary, on thee be peace,
> The Sun is for thy body a raiment,
> The presence of the All-Holy is a
> healing for the wombs.
> Thy body is a veil for the ever forgiving
> and a descent of mercy for mankind.[88]

Schuon's Primordial Gatherings, it would seem, cannot be dismissed as merely the sexual fantasies of an old man or an ambitious cult leader's delusions of grandeur; rather, these dances also had much larger social, ethical, and even eschatological implications. As anthropologists have long been aware, the symbolism of the body in religious dance is used throughout human cultures in order to construct, maintain, and/or deconstruct the central ideals, ethical values, and norms of a given social group. The dance may function in a variety of different ways, ranging from catharsis, to social control, to ritual processes of structure and antistructure.On one hand, as Radcliffe-Brown, Durkheim, or Maurice Bloch have shown, dance may very often serve to reinforce existing ideological structures. But on the other hand, as others such as Judith Hanna have argued, dance may also serve to criticize, undermine, or subvert those same structures and values.[89]

As shown, the traditional Sun Dance had a very profound social significance for the American Indians as a source of communal solidarity, and it appears that Schuon has seized upon and appropriated much of this symbolism for his own ends. A severe critic of modern Western society, which he regarded as the worst extreme of human decadence and corruption, Schuon predicted the imminent downfall of the West and the ultimate triumph of the "primordial man of nature." The time is very nearly at hand when the Native American will return to conquer this corrupt and evil society, and so witness "God's final victory over evil":

> Modern white civilization [is] an error . . . this deviant and unnatural civilization is contrary to . . . every true religion . . . the present world will come to an end, in a future which is not far off.[90]

It appears that Schuon came to regard himself as the prophetic messenger who would usher in this New Age, signalling the downfall of modern Western civilization and the triumph of the "primordial religion." Like the Oglala Sioux, then, he used the Sun Dance as a symbol of a "traditional" religious rite, one that transcends the power of modern society. Whereas the Oglalas used the Sun Dance as a means of dealing with oppression and resisting white authority, however, Schuon made it a part of his diatribe against the "luciferianism" of the modern world, his quest for primordial Nature, and his vision of the imminent millennium.

Second, Schuon also used the symbolism of the dance in order to build and maintain the hierarchical structure of his own community. As Judith Hanna and other anthropologists have shown, the movement of the body through dance is used in many other cultures as a means of supporting the larger social body and affirming the dominant ethical values and morality of the Body Politic. And as shown in the case of the Oglala Sun Dance, the ritual very much serves to reinforce and strengthen social bonds; the dancer sacrifices parts of his own individual body for the sake of the greater social body, thereby cementing the unity of the entire group.[91]

So too Schuon appears to have drawn upon the symbolism of the body and the dance in order to enforce the power of his own community. Like his entire metaphysical system and his ideal social order, his dances were divided into three grades, corresponding to the three levels of his cult. These three grades were then distinguished by stages of initiation, by degrees of nudity, and by amounts of physical or sexual contact with Schuon's own body, which was the center and power source of the entire community. Not unlike many of the ancient Indo-European cultures, he organized a tripartite social body, mirroring the tripartite structure of the physical human body: the head, torso, and genitals. He himself played a role not unlike that of the King in many Indo-European traditions, whose body is an alloform of the entire body politic.[92] For, in the case of the true

"contemplative" or Intellectual man, the body is nothing less than a "theomorphic" vehicle of the Divine Presence; ultimately, in the case of the "deified man"—like Schuon himself—it becomes an "object of adoration" and even a "saving presence":

> The human body in itself . . . is sacrament-symbol because it is "made in the image of God." . . . The body invites to adoration by its Theomorphic Form . . . but, as Plato suggests, this presence is accessible only to the soul that is contemplative.[93]

Through his ritual dances, then, Schuon's body served as a "sacrament," a locus of divine power, and a source of healing, which was literally the axis and center of his religious community. According to a prayer to Schuon composed by his wife, Sa. Aminah, "The Sun is for thy body a raiment. The presence of the All-Holy is a healing for the wombs. Thy body is . . . a descent of mercy."[94] Contact with his body through the dance was supposed to bring vitality and healing to his entire community, to solidify the unity and hierarchical order of his New Civilization. In effect, his dance became a paradigm for his own new Body Politic, which he believed was soon to be realized as a divine revelation for the end of the modern world.

Finally, Schuon also drew upon the symbolism of the Sun Dance as a source of his own divine authority, to legitimate his position at the top of this cultic social hierarchy, and to assert his own "supraethical" or "amoral" status beyond the limitations of all exoteric social forms. For the Native Americans who perform it, the Sun Dance is traditionally said to "center on power and power acquisition";[95] it brings new knowledge, authority, and spiritual efficacy to the individual dancer. Schuon, too, appears to have manipulated the symbolism of the dance as a means of acquiring personal power. As he tells us in his essay "The Sun Dance," power is really what the whole ritual is all about—the power of the "spiritual man" who is identified with the Great Spirit and now serves as the "pontiff" to mankind:

> The idea of "Power" is crucial. . . . The universe is a texture of powers all emanating from one and the same Power which is omnipresent. . . . The spiritual man is united to the Great Spirit by the cosmic powers which . . . purify and transform him: he is simultaneously pontiff, hero, and magician.[96]

But Schuon appears to have taken this symbolism a great deal further than any American Indian would have dared to dream. It is worth noting that whereas

the Sun Dancer "abases" and makes himself pitiful, Schuon appears rather to have exalted and deified himself. Through the dance, Schuon's body was supposed to have become filled with a divine "healing power"—a power of Messianic proportions. Ultimately, he explicitly identified himself with greatest Power of all, the Great Spirit itself, represented by the center pole or *Wakan*-tree. He himself is the "deified man" at the center of his own "play of masks." Hence he has used the symbolism of the Sun Dance not only to set himself up at the top of a vertically stratified tripartite hierarchy, but also to assert his own esoteric power, beyond all hierarchy, beyond all the ethical constraints and moral boundaries that constrain ordinary men. According to "The Veneration of the Shaykh," written by Schuon's wife,

> The Shaykh himself has stated that he is the "instrument for the manifestation of the Religio Perennis at the end of time." . . . His disciples have the . . . obligation to venerate him, to show their awareness of his grandeur. . . .
>
> A celestial manifestation of this magnitude cannot be evaluated as one would an ordinary saint. . . . [T]he Shaykh is the link joining the primordial with the last. . . . He manifests the Center, which unites every spoke.[97]

Here we see the fullest embodiment of Schuon's metaphysical vision and his "esoteric ethics." In the structure of his community, Schuon had created the ideal social and religious institution based on the "Traditional" ethics of theocratic hierarchy, obedience, and submission to higher authority. But simultaneously, he also asserted his own esoteric superiority, his own status as the Supreme Self or the supraethical, radically liberated Esoteric Man who transcends all the finite moral boundaries that limit ordinary humankind.

Conclusions: Ethics and Esotericism in the Scholarly Study of Religions

A red gold noon sultry and broad
over the pregnant earth blowing with desire,
and the massive waters of the Ganges,
glistening, in an ecstasy of death and beatitude.
The silver bangles of the Devadasis are ringing
in the smile and promise of their lustful dance.
So her body laughs and
her limbs are winding like snakes.
And the Gods kiss her dark cheeks,

and her body is liberated through dance
. . . while the sacrificial animal cries in its own blood.
—Frithjof Schuon, "Bajadere"

It may never be known with certainty whether Frithjof Schuon and his disciples actually engaged in any illegal activities, or whether there is any truth to the criminal charges brought against them. Nonetheless, Schuon's teachings and ritual practices represent something far more significant—and perhaps more disturbing—than the mere idiosyncrasies of an eccentric old man. Indeed, his transformation of the Sioux Sun Dance is a clear embodiment and a living, ritualized enactment of his greater metaphysical system and his ethical (or supraethical) ideals.

First, Schuon explicitly appropriated the ritual symbolism of the Native Americans (along with that of a number of other traditions) in order to reinforce his metaphysical system, his social ideology, and his own personal status. In the process, it would seem, he also altered it quite profoundly (indeed, one might legitimately ask whether Schuon's appropriation of the Sun Dance is simply another example of white man's conquest and pillaging of the American Indian).[98] It served as a symbol not only of his rejection of modern Western civilization and his expectation of its downfall with the coming millennium, but also of his own ideal sociopolitical order, based on the tripartite structure of his Tariqa. Schuon appears to have recognized that the bodily and spatial movement of the Sun Dance is a very powerful force of group solidarity and religious authority, and to have used it in order to construct and solidify his own community's identity. For "Dance is sometimes like myth—an idealized disguise to hide an unorthodox practice or ideal."[99] In Schuon's community, the dance was indeed a "play of masks," an idealized construction concealing his own ambitions; but it was also a very serious play, a mask that served to reinforce his dreams of the end of Western society, the return to "primordial Nature," and the birth of a "New Civilization."

More important, however, Schuon's Sun Dance represents a striking ritual embodiment of his own "esoteric ethics," or his "supraethical" ideal. Structured around the symbolism of the center and periphery—the central axis of the sacred tree (Schuon's own naked body) and the outer periphery of the lodge (the circle of nude dancers)—the dance lent itself very naturally to Schuon's basic dichotomy of the esoteric and the exoteric levels of reality. Ethical action and moral distinctions, social laws and religious prohibitions, all belong to the realm of the exoteric: they comprise the world of conventional religion and mainstream society, the mass of ordinary mankind lost in the peripheral illusion of Māyā. For the true esoteric man, the gnostic or "Intellectual," who has penetrated through the periphery and journeyed to the "Center" of the Self, these exoteric laws and moral sanctions may be left behind. According to a

phrase of Meister Eckhart, often cited by Schuon, "to get the kernel you must break the husk."[100] No longer bound by the outer "play of masks," but achieving the "childlike nudity" of the Supreme Self at the Center of existence, the esoteric man can step beyond, transgress, and indeed even "shatter" the ethical constraints that bind other men.

Finally, to close, I suggest that this phenomenon also opens up some much larger comparative issues for the study of mysticism and ethics across cultures and throughout historical periods. First and most immediately, it raises the central question of the relationship between esotericism and ethics—that is, the complex interaction between a secret religious community and the moral boundaries of the surrounding exoteric society. This is by no means a simple or unambivalent relationship, but rather one that can assume many different forms, both ethical and unethical, in different historical contexts. As Michel Foucault aptly observes, "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance."[101] On the one hand, there are many esoteric traditions—including certain Sufi orders like the Chishtiya, the more aristocratic and elitist European Masonic Orders, and perhaps most notably, the Hebrew Kabbalistic traditions[102]—that not only conform to traditional religious and ethical norms, but that in many ways even *intensify and exaggerate them*. Indeed, they display what Elliot Wolfson has aptly called a kind of "hypernomianism" rather than antinomianism: a severe heightening of traditional norms and ethical commands, which seem too difficult and too arduous to be followed by the ordinary masses in mainstream exoteric society.[103] Yet on the other hand, there are many other more radical esoteric organizations that find in the hidden realms of secrecy an alternative social space where they are free to violate, transgress, even wholly invert the norms and conventions of exoteric society. The Aghoris and left-hand Tāntrikas in India are among the most striking and infamous examples of this phenomenon, but it would also include revolutionary secret societies such as the Mau Mau in Kenya or the White Lotus and Triad groups in China.[104]

Yet in either case, whether deployed for conservative or subversive, orthodox or revolutionary purposes, it would seem that the underlying logic and strategic power of secrecy is similar in all of these diverse movements: in each of these cases, the power of secrecy lies precisely in the strategy of *exclusion*—the restriction of certain highly valued knowledge to an elite minority of initiated insiders. For as Georg Simmel long ago pointed out, this act of exclusion and the strict guarding of certain valued knowledge is always a powerful source of social status and distinction: the act of concealment naturally tends to elevate the prestige of the "one who knows":

> The secret gives one a position of exception; it operates as a purely socially determined attraction.

> From secrecy, which shades all that is profound and significant, grows the typical error according to which everything mysterious is something important and essential. Before the unknown, man's natural impulse to idealize and his natural fearfulness cooperate toward the same goal: to intensify the unknown through imagination.[105]

In sum, whether employed in the service of hypernomian or antinomian ends, the tactic of secrecy is virtually always a profound source of what Bourdieu has aptly dubbed "symbol capital."

The striking paradox of the Schuon case is his own profoundly Janus-faced, even schizoid, attitude. In his published writings, he clearly insists on the ethical dimension, the strict adherence to orthodoxy and exoteric law; yet in his private writings and personal cult, it seems, he opted for a far more explicitly antinomian or perhaps supranomian esoteric ideal. As such, he presents us with a fascinating—even if rather disturbing—illustration of the complex interrelations between esotericism and ethics, showing us the exaggerated extremes of both the hypernomian and the antinomian in the tangled play of secrecy.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the Schuon case also offers us a striking example not only of the problem of the ethics of mysticism, but of the *ethical implications of our own scholarship on religious mysticism itself*. More and more, it would seem scholars of religions have found it difficult to accept the early ideals of authors such as Joachim Wach or Mircea Eliade; we can no longer cling, I think, to the ideal of an objective value-free approach to the study of religions, which would (allegedly) "bracket" or "suspend" all normative judgements and the personal biases or moral commitments of the individual scholar. For as Bourdieu very poignantly reminds us, the realm of scholarship is, every bit as much as the realms of politics, economics or religion, a fundamentally *interested* domain—a realm of competition and contestation over valued resources and status within an asymmetrical hierarchy. It is, "like any other field, the locus of a struggle to determine the conditions and criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy. . . . [T]he different sets of individuals . . . who are defined by these different criteria have a vested interest in them."[106]

As such, the scholarly study of religion can and very often does bear its own very real, even if unstated, political implications—its own deeply interested ideological agendas that are presented under the seemingly "disinterested" or "objective" discourse of scholarship. As Bruce Lincoln has argued in the case of Georges Dumézil—whose study of the Indo-European social and religious structures has often been criticized as a masked form of propaganda for his own sociopolitical ideology—"there is a political dimension to all religious discourse," including that of academy: "Scholarship, like myth, is an arena of discourse wherein those who participate are continually constructing and reconstructing the very ground on which they tread. . . . [I]t is inevitably . . . a site of political struggle."[107]

The tactics of secrecy may well be legitimate, useful, and appropriate methods within the realm of religious faith and practice; indeed, in some cases, they may even be necessary survival strategies for the preservation of a marginalized or dominated subculture.[108] Yet the strategems of secrecy are not appropriate methods within the realm of scholarship. Unlike a member of an esoteric religious community, the scholar of religions today has a fundamental obligation to the ideals of honesty and up-frontness—what Jonathan Z. Smith has called the duty to "*relentless self-consciousness*" and tireless self-criticism.[109] If it is true that all scholarship, like all action in the social field, is fundamentally interested and invested with all sorts of ethical, normative, and political motives, then as self-conscious, self-critical scholars of religions, we have a basic duty to "lay our cards on the table," as it were—to render our own presuppositions, faith commitments, and moral biases as explicitly as possible, opening them up to public scrutiny, criticism, and potential modification.

Read in light of his religious community and his primordial dances, Schuon's writings appear to be not only an elaborate "play of masks" concealing his own personal ambitions; they are also a complex set of philosophical arguments legitimating his sociopolitical ideology and his dream of creating his own "New Civilization." Schuon, in short, is a telling reminder that it is not only mystics and their remarkable religious experiences that carry ethical implications; indeed, our own discourse as scholars does as well—and often with equally profound, though perhaps less obvious or immediate, consequences for the world around us.

Notes

1. Smith, author of the famous best-seller *The Religions of Man*, praises Schuon as "a living wonder; intellectual a propos religion, equally in depth and breadth, the paragon of our time. I know of no living thinker who begins to rival him" (statement printed on the back of the 1975 edition of *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (World Wisdom Books). Nasr has given perhaps the most outspoken praise and support for Schuon: "Schuon seems like the cosmic intellect itself impregnated by the energy of divine grace surveying the whole of the reality surrounding man and elucidating all the concerns of human existence in the light of sacred knowledge"(*Knowledge and the Sacred* [New York: Crossroad, 1981], 107). A more recent admirer, James Cutsinger, praises Schuon's work as nothing less than "a beauty that burns," a message that "produces a shock, as if one were swallowing light" ("A Knowledge that Wounds our Nature: The Message of Frithjof Schuon," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 3 [1992]: 465).

   Brown and Schuon were good friends for many years, up until the early 1980s, when they had a falling out. Brown cites Schuon numerous times in his well-known book *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Baltimore, 1953), and Schuon in turn cites Brown throughout his writings on the American Indians.
2. See Schuon, *The Play of Masks* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1992), 41ff, and "The Sun Dance," *Studies in Comparative Religion* (Winter, 1968). Schuon visited both Sioux and Crow reservations in South Dakota and Montana in 1959 and again in 1963, when he claims to have been adopted into both tribes ("A Message on North American Indian Religion," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 15 [1983]).

3. This claim is made in the texts entitled "The Seventh Theme" and "The Veneration of the Shaykh," written by Schuon's wife, Sa. Aminah, and hand-corrected by Schuon himself; these texts were part of the various instructions for members of the Bloomington group.
4. "Mark Koslow's Account of the Schuon Cult: Written in 1991 for Cult Members to Help Get Them Out." Typed by Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy. For a complete list of my sources on Schuon's community, see Appendix A. For details on the trial, see *Bloomington Herald Times*, 30 November 1991, 1. For a summary of these proceedings, see Appendix B.
5. On this point, see Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 62ff, 70ff; *Avoir un Centre* (Paris, 1988), 15f. On the concept of the "suspension of the ethical," see Steve Wasserstrom, "The Suspension of the Ethical" (unpublished manuscript) and his full-length study *Religion after Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
6. Wilhelm Halbfass, ed., *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 273, 277, 276. On Schuon's heavy reliance on Vedānta, which he regarded as the quintessence of Indian philosophy and a key element in his own metaphysical system, see *Language of the Self* (Madras: Ganesh, 1959).
7. Schuon is thus among the most extreme examples of the very widespread popular image of the "Mystic" and " mystical experience," which Steven Katz and other scholars have so vehemently criticized: he embodies the ideal of the Mystic as the one who goes beyond the limited forms of "exoteric" religious authority, to reach the pure Center of naked, unmediated experience at the esoteric heart of all religious traditions. As Katz characterizes this popular view: "at the exalted level of *the* mystic experience the specificity of given religious systems is transcended in a oneness which is common to all true mystics. There in the presence of the Absolute, the self is no longer 'Jew nor Greek, male nor female'" ("The Conservative Character of Mystical Experience," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions,* edited by Steven Katz [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983]). Katz, however, argues strongly that individual mystical experiences tend to reflect and reinforce the unique contexts and specific religious traditions in which they emerge. On this point see also Robert Gimello, "Mysticism in its Contexts," in the same volume, 61–63).
8. Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War and Sacrifice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), xvi.
9. On Schuon's rather idiosyncratic use of this term, see Nasr, "Introduction," in *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon* (New York, 1986), 27). This is to "emphasize its non-multiple but unitary nature, as the science of Ultimate Reality."
10. Most of Schuon's metaphysical system can be found in the earlier works of Guénon, such as *The Crisis of the Modern World, The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (London: Penguin, 1975 [1945]); *Orient et Occident,* and many others. Schuon's political views are strikingly similar to those of the Fascist metaphysician and representative of "Traditionalism," Julius Evola. Evola's classic reactionary treatise, *Revolt against the Modern World (Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* [Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1976]). For good discussions of Evola's metaphysical system and its political implications, see Thomas Sheehan, "Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist," *Social Research* 48 (1981) and the work of Steve Wasserstrom, such as *Religion after Religion* and his unpublished essay "Eliade and Evola."
11. See especially his chapter, "The Onto-Theological Chain" in *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism* (Bloomington, 1986), 61; Nasr, "Introduction," in *Essential Writings*, 30.
12. Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism,* 63.
13. Schuon, *Avoir un Centre* (Paris, 1988), 15.
14. Schuon, "*Ātma-Māyā*," 89; cf. *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, xxii.
15. Schuon, *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 30–31.
16. Nasr, "Introduction," in *Essential Writings*, 12.
17. Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 9; cf. *The Play of Masks*, 27.
18. Schuon, *Castes et Races* (Paris: Arche Milano, 1979). It is worth noting that this is one of the only books that Seyyed Hossein Nasr does not cite in his anthology *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon*. Moreover, Nasr makes no mention of this work in his *Knowledge and the Sacred*, though he cites virtually every other publication of Schuon's. It would seem this side of Schuon's thought was rather an embarrassment to Dr. Nasr. On

Schuon's metaphysical view of caste, see "Principle of Distinction in the Social Order," in *Language of the Self*, 136ff.

19. Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, 61ff. "In the opposition between the head and the body . . . the head represents man, Consciousness, and body woman, Existence . . . the whole body assumes a feminine aspect when it is opposed to the . . . Intellect" (*Stations of Wisdom* [London, 1978], 83); cf. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 174.
20. Schuon, *Avoir un centre*, 15, 37. See also Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred:* "The traditional science of man sees the concept of caste as a key for the understanding of human types" (179).
21. Schuon, *Avoir un centre*, 37.
22. Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom*, 83. "The human body comprises three regions which . . . are like three different worlds: the head, the body and the sexual parts. The head . . . corresponds to consciousness; the body corresponds to . . . being; and the sexual parts correspond to . . . love" ("Sacred Nudity," an essay in Schuon's *Memoirs*, 3; cf. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 174).
23. Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos and Society*, 154.
24. Schuon, *Memoires and Meditations.* In a section of his spiritual directions entitled "Who Are the Profane?" Schuon writes, "By 'profane' three categories are understood: civilizationists, exoterists and heretics. Civilizationists are those who believe in the modern Western civilization . . . exoterists are those believe their religion to be the only true one; and heretics are those who . . . profess opinions which are intrinsically false. . . . Civilizationists [are] dupes of the 'Greek miracle,' the Renaissance, progress, scientism, the machine, and so on." As Koslow recounts, "Schuon has said that 3/4 of the world's population should be killed because they are profane . . . nearly everyone outside the tariqa is called profane" ("Mark Koslow's Account," 33).
25. Schuon, *Play of Masks*, 70, cf 62ff. On Tantra and the transcendence of orthodox sexual laws, see *Avoir un Centre*, 44–45.
26. A scathing criticism of Schuon has been made by a former disciple, Sun Ynona (Aldo Vidali): "[Schuon] is a master of comparative religion who developed a system of subtle double-think for self aggrandisement. . . . The formula mixes traditional doctrines . . . with heretical inventions designed to make the unwary devotee believe [Schuon] has direct guidance from heaven and is infallible. . . . [Schuon] acts like any other puffed-up cult leader" (Ynona, *Feathered Snake*: *From the Sublime to the Ridiculous. How an Alleged Sufi Tariqah Turned into a Syncretist Bison Dung Personality Cult and Wild West Nudie Show* [unpublished manuscript]).
27. See Nasr, "Introduction," in *Essential Writings*, 50ff.
28. Note to "Mark Kosolow's Account," 10.
29. Schuon, "A Message on North American Indian Religion," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 15 (1983): 64. When asked about his religious belief, Schuon told the "Bloomington Herald Times" that "his affiliation is for the Red Indian cultural form" (20 October 1991).
30. See Schuon, *Language of the Self*, chap. 11.
31. "Mark Koslow's Account," 23. "Schuon was walking through an avenue of trees carrying a heavy rock, which represented to him the Law with which he was burdened. . . . Across the meadow, coming towards him was Tara . . . completely naked... She came near him and said . . . 'I do not think anymore.' . . . Tara took Schuon's hand and put it on her vagina . . . since there is only being and not thinking, anything is allowed" ("Mark Koslow's Account," 21; summarizing the report of Schuon's wife, Sa. Aminah). As recorded in Schuon's memoirs, "A man like Ramakrishna turned into a beautiful version of Kali, naked, embraced Schuon in sexual union and disappeared into his chest." As a result of this vision, Schuon began painting icons of the Goddess, with the Mantra "Hari Om" written above her spread open legs (ibid., 23).

    According to Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy, his former physician, and Dr. Wolfgang Smith, "these visions represent not something authentic, but a spiritual pathology"—a pathology that dates from a very early period in Schuon's life ("Mark Koslow's Account," 12).
32. Schuon painted a large number of "icons," many of them depicting himself (usually naked, in various yogic and other sacred postures), and others portraying various female

figures such as the Virgin Mary, the Sioux Buffalo Cow Woman, or his wives (usually naked). Copies of the images were distributed to his close disciples along with a text, "The Message of the Icons." Unfortunately, I have been unable to obtain permission to reproduce these images in this article, so the reader will have to remain content with verbal descriptions.

33. "Sacred Nudity," an essay included in Schuon's *Memoirs*.
34. "The Message of the Icons"; a hand-written document by Schuon's wife, Sa. Aminah.
35. This is stated fairly explicitly in the text written by Schuon's wife, Sa. Aminah, "The Veneration of the Shaykh," where Schuon is identified as the universal Logos, which is manifested variously as Christ, the Buddha, Muhammad, and so on.
36. "Mark Koslow's Account," 4.
37. Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, xix–xx. cf. "Wohpe and the Gift of the Pipe." James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 109ff.
38. Schuon, "The Message of the Icons."
39. See note 32 above.
40. Quoted in "Mark Koslow's Account," 23.
41. This description of the group was given to me personally by Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy.
42. "Mark Koslow's Account," 36; cf. the section of his directions on prayer and spiritual life, "Social Principles," 286.
43. Mary Ann Danner, in a personal testimony sent to the members of the Schuon cult, writes: "Schuon has abolished the maglis, he allows Moslems to drink beer, almost no one keeps the fast at Ramadan, etc. Schuon has abolished exoterism, orthodox form: he has become his own religion, his own law" ("Mark Koslow's Account," 20).
44. "The Shaykh . . . is not an ordinary man, but an extroardinary man. . . . No one has expounded metaphysical truth with such completeness as the Shaykh; no one has demonstrated the metaphysical truth, the universal principles underlying the great traditions . . . their underlying unity . . . their exoterisms and esoterisms . . . with such unheard of precision as the Shaykh. It is like a revelation of mysteries at the end of time . . . he is simply without parallel. . . . The Shaykh himself, his personal radiance . . . made of grandeur and otherwordliness . . . is a perfect embodiment of his teachings and our most precious ideals" ("The Veneration of the Shaykh," a text written by Sa. Aminah and corrected by Schuon, for circulation among the disciples; 1–2).
45. Ibid., 4–5.
46. Ibid., 5. "A celestial manifestation of this magnitude cannot be evaluated as one would an ordinary saint. . . . His mandate pertains to universality. . . . 'Extremes meet': the Shaykh is the link joining the primordial with the last . . . embodying a vision that embraces the whole circle. He manifests the Center which . . . unites every spoke" (ibid.).
47. Nasr, *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon*, 46. "Modern civilization . . . which after destroying traditional Christian civilization has been spreading into other parts of the globe, is false not only in its results but in its premises. . . . The result is that debilitating secularism which has led to the destruction of the inner man" (ibid., 47). Schuon derives much of his criticism of modernity from the arch antimodernist René Guénon; cf. *The Crisis of the Modern World* (London, 1975); *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (New York, 1972).
48. Schuon, "Who Are the Profane?"
49. "The Veneration of the Shaykh," 1, 4.
50. "Mark Koslow's Account," 36.
51. On the central importance of dance generally for the Sioux, see Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 67. The origins of the Sun Dance can probably be traced to around 1700 among the Plains Algonquins. The dance appears, however, to have assumed new importance after contact with the white men and particularly after the failure of the Ghost Dance movement in the late nineteenth century. Following the Wounded Knee massacre, the Ghost Dance and other rituals were forbidden by the government for the next fifty years; nevertheless, many tribes began to refashion the traditional Sun Dance, to disguise it and continue it in a new form. Finally, in the 1960s the Sun Dance was revived as the most

important of all rituals among many tribes. In the process, however, it also underwent a significant shift. As Jorgensen explains, it changed "from a hope of cultural transformation, promised by the Ghost Dance, to a hope for personal redemption . . . promised by the Sun Dance" (*Sun Dance Religion*, 77). See also James Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion: The Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). On the relationship between the Ghost Dance and Sun Dance, see Raymond DeMallie, "The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account," *Pacific Historical Review* 51 (1982): 397.

52. John Bierhart, *The Mythology of North America* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 160; cf. Pierrette Desy, "The Sun Dance among the Native Americans," *Mythologies: America, African and Old European*, edited by Y. Bonnefoy (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 43; Archie Fire Lame Deer, *Gift of Power: The Life and Teaching of Lakota Medicine Man* (Santa Fe: Bear and Co., 1992), 226–27.
53. See *Sacred Pipe*, 80; cf. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 178. On the symbolism of the sacred pipe, see Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 77–78. In some versions, the pipe is ritually presented by a young girl representing the Buffalo Cow Woman, thereby reenacting the traditional mythic narrative. See Lame Deer, *Gift of Power*, 226ff.
54. Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 71; cf. J.R. Walker, "Oglala Metaphysics," in *Teachings from the American Earth*: *Indian Religion and Philosophy,* edited by D. Tedlock (New York: Liveright, 1992).
55. Lame Deer, *Gift of Power*, 245–46. cf. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 176–82.
56. Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 95. Walker, *Lakota Myth*, 206–8.
57. Brown, *The Sacred Pipe*, 86.
58. See Lame Deer, *Gift of Power*, 247.
59. See Jorgensen, *Sun Dance Religion*, 3; Peter Bolz, "Ethnic Identity and Cultural Resistance: The Oglala Sioux of the Pine Ridge Reservation Today," *North American Indian Studies,* 2d ed., edited by P. Hovens (Gottingen: Edition Herodot, 1984), 205.
60. Bea Medicine, "Native American Resistance to Integration: Contemporary Confrontations and Religious Revitalization," *Plains Anthropologist* 26 (1981): 289, 277.
61. Lame Deer, *Gift of Power*, 242. On the power and status of the shaman or holy man in Oglala religion, see Medicine, "Native American Resistance to Integration," 284
62. Schuon, "Language of the Self," chap. 11 in *Essential Writings*, 188. Here Schuon reflects another a more general fashion among New Age religions, which have become interested in Native American spirituality in recent years.
63. "On the Six Themes," a text of meditation and prayer. See also *Stations of Wisdom*.
64. Schuon, "Sacred Nudity," 2. For Schuon, nudity symbolizes being outside of or beyond ordinary social and religious boundaries: it is esoteric, beyond all outward forms: "nudity is the garment of the inner man" (ibid., 7). However, Schuon appears to have been far more interested in *watching* these nude dances than in actually performing them; his consort, Sa. Badriyah, regularly performed private dances for him, supposedly representing the various sacred dances of the world—Hindu Balinese, and particularly Native American—and all performed nude ("Mark Koslow's Account," 4).
65. "The Seventh Theme," a text written by Sa. Badriyah with Schuon's approval.
66. "Mark Koslow's Account," 17–19.
67. Schuon regarded the Sun Dance as one of the most profound of all the world's religious symbols, and the quintessence of his own metaphysical system: "The Sun dance . . . is union with the Great Spirit. . . . It is a symbol of our connection with God . . . we are like an eagle flying toward the Sun . . . above earthly things . . . in the holy solitude with our Creator" ("A Message on North American Indian Religion," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 15 [1983]: 64).
68. "The primordial gatherings . . . combine the Indian Days . . . ('commemorations of our affinity with the Indians') with Schuon's need of nudity. There are three categories: 1) Indian days for visitors and those outside the Inner Circle where the women wear what amount to Indianized bikinis. 2) Gatherings for the Inner Circle (perhaps 50–60 people) and 'qualified' visitors. . . . The women are all naked except for slight loin cloths, which hide hardly anything. . . . The imitation Sa. Badriyah does of the bringing of the Sacred

Pipe (Schuon says Sa. Badriyah is an incarnation of Pte-San-Win—Buffalo-Cow woman) is performed completely naked. . . . Schuon wears an Indian war bonnet and an absurd costume which is a kind of combination loin-cloth and leggings except that his genitals are not covered. . . . His pubic hair is shaved off. 3) The 3rd category of gatherings are only attended by the Thabitids, Haggids, Schuon and Badriyah. . . . These are completely naked and the dances are more suggestive . . . and there is more intimacy with Schuon, though as he is now impotent it does not go very far" ("Mark Koslow's Account," 18.)

These accounts have been confirmed by the court testimonies of several witnesses, particularly those of Livio Fornara, Ronald and Sarah Bodmer, by other former disciples, such as Aldo Vidali and Stephen Lampert, and by Dr. Coomarasamy. According to the court testimony of Ronald and Sarah Bodmer, "We . . . attest that we attended in the fall of 1989 a meeting . . . [at the] residence of Mr. Frithjof Schuon, a meeting of Frithjof Schuon's followers, during which certain followers wore little costumes showing the inferior part of the womens' sex and the superior part of the penis and scrotum of the men. The dance took place while Frithjof Schuon was watching. A 13 to 14 year old boy was watching and so was little Mary Elizabeth Casey (a 5 year old girl). . . . Before 1989 we attended every year a couple of these meetings, noticing that the costumes were diminishing each following year. We have no doubt that since 1989 this tendency towards nudity has continued." Livio Fornara's testimony supplies a similar corroboration of the account. This description is also confirmed in Sa. Aminah's text, "The Seventh Theme."

69. Ibid. This description is supported by the testimonies of several witnesses at the court hearing, particularly that of the Bodmers.
70. "Mark Koslow's Account," 18. The details of this account were confirmed by the court testimonies of Ronald and Sarah Bodmer. See Appendix B. This claim that Sa. Badriyah is an incarnation of Pte-San-Win is also supported by several statements of Schuon's other wives, such as Sa. Aminah's text, "The Message of the Icons."
71. "Mark Koslow's Account," 24.
72. This description is found in a letter of Aldo Vidali (a former member of the Tariqa) written for those still in the group. It is also confirmed by Livo Fornara's and Ronald Bodmer's court testimonies. "With the large drum in the background and the Indian . . . singers singing Indian songs, Schuon, with genitals exposed, goes to the center of the Indian lodge. The women circle around him clockwise. . . . From the center toward the periphery, Schuon goes up to each woman in turn and gives them an embrace, pressing his chest and stomach against the breasts and abdomen of the women" ("Mark Koslow's Account," 18).
73. Schuon, "Language of the Self," in *Essential Writings*, 187–88.
74. Schuon, "The Sun Dance," *Studies in Comparative Religion* (Winter 1968): 3–4.
75. Ibid., 5.
76. Ibid., 4. "According to the supreme point of view—which constitutes the esoteric . . . it is only in God that I am really I . . . the created I is but a veil which hides me from the 'Self' who am uncreated. . . . It is certain that I am not nothing; not being nothing, I am everything; being everything I am none other than He. . . . It is like the Sun that fills space and drowns it in light" ("Meditations on the Six Themes," 229).
77. Schuon, *Play of Masks*, 41–42. "The Sun dance . . . is union with the Great Spirit. . . . It is a symbol of our connection with God" ("Message on North American Indian Religion," 64). "The movement is coming and going between the central tree . . . and the circular shelter. . . . At the Center the dancers draw their strength; their withdrawal corresponds to the expansive stage of radiation of the spiritual influence of the tree" ("Sun Dance," 3).
78. Schuon, *Play of Masks*, 27n.
79. Ibid., 41; see also Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 174.
80. Woman, he believes, represents Māyā, which is the source of both illusion and revelation, masking and unmasking: "The key to understandng the mystery of salvation through woman . . . lies in the nature of *Māyā*, If *Māyā* can attract us toward the outward, she can

also attract us toward the inward. Eve is . . . manifesting Māyā. Mary is Grace . . . reintegrating Māyā" (*Essential Writings*, 418).

"Pure Esoterism is naked women. . . . The Principle is: Ātma (Schuon) becomes Māyā (the naked women) in order that women (Māyā) become Schuon (Ātma) . . . the center becomes the periphery in order that the periphery may become the center. 'God become[s] man in order that man may become God. . . . The primordial gatherings are the quintessential expression of the doctrine" ("Mark Koslow's Account," 19).

81. Schuon, "Sun Dance," 4.
82. Schuon, "Sacred Nudity," 4. "The penis represents the generative power . . . of the Logos. The vulva . . . is the strait yet liberating gate: the entrance to the pure, blissful Substance. The linga signifies that the Infinite takes on the form of the finite. . . . It becomes a sacrament for deifying the human; the yoni signifies that the finite or human returns to the Infinite or Divine" (ibid., 4)
83. "Mark Koslow's Account," appendix, 2.
84. Schuon, "Sun Dance," 3. "The human body in itself . . . is sacrament-symbol because it is 'made in the image of God.' . . . The body invites to adoration by its Theomorphic Form . . . it can convey a celestial and saving presence; but, as Plato suggests, this presence is accessible only to the soul that is contemplative" ("The Theomorphic Form of the Human Body," in *From the Divine to the Human* [Bloomington, Ind.: Word-Wisdom Books, 1986]).
85. "Mark Koslow's Account," 19, paraphrasing comments by Sa. Aminah and Sa. Badriyah.
86. Schuon, "Sacred Nudity," 4; see note 80 above.
87. "Mark Koslow's Account," 8, 19. "We are totally transformed in God and changed into Him; in the same way as, in the sacrament, the bread is changed into the Body of Christ, so am I changed into Him, so that He makes me one with His own Being . . . there is no longer any distinction" ("Concerning Meditation," a text written by Schuon for his disciples, 230).
88. "The Seventh Theme," by Sa. Aminah.
89. See Hanna, *To Dance is Human*, 118ff; cf. Peter Brinson, "Anthropology and the Study of Dance," in *Society and the Dance*: *The Social Anthropology of Process and Performance,* edited by P. Spencer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 211. According to Radcliffe-Brown, dance is use to create an orderly social existence through transmission of culturally desirable sentiments (*The Andamen Islanders* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922], 233ff). Likewise, Durkheim suggests that the powerful collective effervescence of the dance serves to transform the dancer, making him lose his sense of individuality and uniting him with the social group (*The Elementary Forms of the Religions Life* [London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1915], 218ff).
90. Schuon, "A Message on North American Indian Religion," 64.
91. As Hanna comments, dance often "served sociological designs. . . . It was used as a communicative symbolic system to create, reflect and reinforce social stratification and a centralized political organization encompassing diverse . . . ethnic groups. . . . The more authoritarian, rigidly stratified and ethnically heterogeneous a society the greater is the need to use shared symbolic communication to bind that society" (*To Dance Is Human*, 151).
92. On the image of the king's body as an alloform of the social hierarchy—a myth found throughout Indo-European cultures—see Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos and Society*, 143ff.
93. Schuon, "The Theomorphic Form of the Human Body."
94. "The Veneration of the Shaykh," 4–5.
95. Jorgensen, *The Sun Dance Religion*, p.177.
96. Schuon, "Sun Dance," 4.
97. "The Veneration of the Shaykh," 4–5.
98. Some Native Americans today would no doubt be quite horrified at Schuon's use of their ritual. As one critic writes, "Has the white man not done enough to abuse the Red Indian? How dare [Schuon] invade the Red Man's l world with an arrogant cult, distorting traditional rites, syncretizing the Red way with . . . pseudo-Tantric dilettantism and megalomania?" (Ynona, *Feathered Snake*).

It is perhaps worth noting the warnings of Sioux medicine men such as Lame Deer, "very bad things happen when a Sun dance is put on in the wrong way" (*Gift of Power*, 241).

99. Hanna, *Dance, Sex and Gender*, 249.
100. "It is necessary to distinguish . . . between the man-center who is determined by the intellect and rooted in the Immutable, and the man-periphery, who is an accident. . . . That is the meaning of . . . the distinction between the 'inner man' and 'outer man.' . . . The former may enjoy or suffer . . . while remaining impassable in his immortal kernel which coincides with his state of union with God. . . . Every pneumatic is 'true man and true God'" (Schuon, *Play of Masks*, 27).
101. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 101.
102. See my article "Elitism and Esotericism: Strategies of Secrecy and Power in French Freemasonry and South Indian Tantra," *Numen* 44 (January 1997). For good studies of the "elitist" character of Freemasonry in America and Europe, see Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture; 1880–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in 18th Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). On the use of secrecy to reinforce male elder power in Aboriginal society, see Ian Keen, *Knowledge and Secrecy in Aboriginal Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).
103. See Wolfson's essay in chapter 3.
104. On the use of secrecy by poor lower classes in the Vodou tradition, see, for example, Brown, *Mama Lola*; Davis, *Passages of Darkness*; on the Mau Mau and White Lotus groups, see Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham, *The Myth of the Mau Mau: Nationalism in Kenya* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).
105. Simmel, "The Secret and the Secret Society," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel,* translated by K. Wolff (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950), 332, 333. See also my articles, "Elitism and Esotericism," and "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions," *History of Religions* 37, no. 3 (1988): 209–48.
106. Bourdieu , *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 11; cf. *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).
107. Lincoln, *Death, War and Sacrifice*, 252.
108. See my article "The Torment of Secrecy."
109. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.

Appendix A

Primary Sources for the Beliefs and Practices of the Schuon Community

Most of the primary materials in this paper come from a source who was at one time a novice within the Schuon group, but who now wishes to remain anonymous. He received this material from Mark Koslow, who hoped to persuade other members to leave the cult. From the rather vast amount of information at my disposal, I focus in particular on the following:

1. "Mark Koslow's Account of the Schuon Cult: Written in 1991 for cult members to help get them out." Typed by Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy. This text was written by a former close disciple of Schuon for the sake of those still in the community. Because of its simple, honest style and its general lack of bitterness or spite, I believe this to be a fairly reliable source. Moreover, it has the approval of Dr. Coomaraswamy, Schuon's former physician (son of the art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy).

2. Directions on the sacred dance, the structure of the *Tariqa,* and the Invocation of the Divine Name, written by Schuon for circulation among the closest disciples. This amounts to more than 100 pages of handwritten and typed material. The most important of these are

a. "On the Six Themes"
b. "Sacred Nudity"
c. "Social Principles"
d. "The Six Indispensable Pillars of the Path"

3. Similar directions written by Schuon's wives, Sa. Badriyah and Sa. Aminah, and hand-corrected by Schuon. The most important of these are

a. "The Sacred Dance"
b. "The Seventh Theme"
c. "The Veneration of the Shaykh"
d. "The Message of the Icons"

4. Schuon's personal memoirs, entitled *Memories and Meditations,* which were given in parts to his disciples for meditation.

5. A large set of photographs of Schuon, his wives, and his ritual dances, taken by Schuon and his disciples; this also includes a great number of photocopies of Schuon's own paintings (his "icons"), most of which portray nude women, such as Pte-San-Win, the Virgin Mary, or his wives, with the genitalia exposed.

6. Letters written by former disciples to help persuade other cult members to leave. These include Mary Ann Danner (wife of Professor Victor Danner of the University of Indiana), Aldo Vidali, and Stephen Lampert.

7. A short book by a former disciple, Sum Ynona (a.k.a. Aldo Vidali), entitled *Feathered Snake*: *From the Sublime to the Ridiculous. How an Alleged Sufi Tariqah Turned into a Syncretist Bison Dung Personality Cult and Wild West Nudie Show*. This is not an entirely reliable work, as it is quite vicious and spiteful. It does contain useful information, however.

8. Courtroom transcripts and affidavits from the trial.

9. Newspaper articles commenting on the trial, primarily from the "Bloomington Herald Times," 15 October 1991 through 21 November 1991.

I also make use of Schuon's rather vast body of publications, most importantly *The Feathered Sun* (Bloomington, 1991), *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1975), and *The Play of Masks* (Bloomington, 1992).

Appendix B

The Charges of Child Molestation and Sexual Battery Brought against Frithjof Schuon

On 14 October 1991 Frithjof Schuon, age eighty-four, was indicted on charges of sexual battery and child molestation, based on the alleged presence of three young girls at his ritual dances. At the court hearing, held on 28 October, Schuon was

alleged to have forced three girls, ages fifteen, fourteen, and thirteen, to participate in his nude gatherings during March 1991, where they were touched with the intent to arouse sexual desire. According to the "Bloomington Herald Times," the allegations were as follows: "1) That on March 23–7 and again on May 17, Schuon committed child-molesting by 'fondling or touching' three girls, aged 15, 14 and 13, with intent to arouse sexual desire. 2) That on the same dates, Schuon committed sexual battery by touching the girls with intent to arouse sexual desire, when said persons were compelled to submit to touching by force or imminent threat of force, to wit, by undue cult influences" (15 October 1991).

Further evidence from other witnesses alleges that a five-year-old girl was also present at some of these ritual gatherings: According to the testimony of Ronald and Sarah Bodmer, "We . . . attest that we attended in the fall of 1989 a meeting . . . the residence of Mr. Frithjof Schuon, a meeting of Frithjof Schuon's followers, during which certain followers wore little costumes showing the inferior part of the womens' sex and the superior part of the penis and scrotum of the men. The dance took place while Frithjof Schuon was watching. A 13 to 14 year old boy was watching and so was little Mary Elizabeth Casey (a 5 year old girl). . . . Before 1989 we attended every year a couple of these meetings, noticing that the costumes were diminishing each following year. We have no doubt that since 1989 this tendency towards nudity has continued and we believe what Mark Koslow said having seen on March 23–7, 1991."

(It is perhaps worth noting that in the course of the hearing, two of Schuon's wives also committed perjury regarding the activities of the group).

Rather abruptly, following a two-month investigation, the case was terminated on 20 November due to a legal technicality, and Schuon was released. The reasons for this are not entirely clear. The prosecuting attorney, Bob Miller, stated that there was insufficient evidence to continue the trial. It later became public, however, that Miller's deputy prosecutor, David Hunter, had conducted the investigation improperly (although it was never specified precisely how); moreover, it was said that he "failed to provide proper legal guidance to the grand jurors about what the law required to charge someone with those offences." Hunter and Miller then had a bitter dispute over this issue: Hunter wished to continue the investigation, while Miller wished to terminate it, a conflict which finally led to Hunter's resignation and the end of the trial (*Bloomington Herald Times,* 30 November 1991, 1).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Of Ethics and Mysticism: Concluding Reflections

by Purushottama Bilimoria

I AM NOT a mystic, nor do I have the requisite credentials of a scholar of mysticism. Given that I am neither, the task of writing the concluding chapter of this book presents me with a challenge. Granted, I have taught in this area and written on Hindu mysticism. I have also closely reviewed several papers on mysticism that have arrived on my desk as editor of *Sophia*, the cross-cultural journal in philosophy of religion and ethics that has a commitment to keeping alive such debates. Still, my real interest and also the "calling" in this instance arises from my work in ethics, and I suppose "comparative ethics" to some extent. (I happen to be presently working on an anthology on Indian ethics, so this has been a welcome conversation.) As I read through the essays in this volume, I was excited and even provoked by the breadth and depth of discussion in each of the contributions, as well as the frankness and openness with which the debate is being effected. Yet another frontier has been intelligently explored with the emergence of this large discussion in print. My role in this final essay is to pause, as it were, at the borders of this frontier and reflect more on the *form* of the debate rather than dwell on the details of the analysis and argumentation that the respective authors have more than ably handled; this is a concern with the gap (or what the French philosophers would call *différence*) between ethics and (the history of) mysticism. In particular, I raise some points in respect to the framing of *ethics* qua moral theories, vis-à-vis the mystical or simply the theological, that informs the debate and has been highlighted in the healthy discursive exchange in the preceding pages, beginning with the editors' terms of reference that help engender this timely and lively debate.

Let me then start with some prefatory observations on the most poignant expression in the subtitle of this volume: *ethical status*. As a comparative philosopher and ethical thinker who locates himself in both classical and contemporary, as well as Eastern and Western, developments, I am interested to see how ethics

has been made relevant to this discussion, or what precise interventionist role is assigned to ethics, and indeed (for my own work in the area) how the boundaries or *limits* of ethics might possibly be extended through such an applied research program that also has significant cross-cultural input and import. I am also anxious, however, that ethics as a historically important discipline of thought is not, as it were, given a "short shrift," that is, that the study of ethics is not unduly compromised or otherwise uncritically overtaxed by some other process, for example, the matrices of normativity, nomothetic prescriptivism, absolutism, relativism, or the utterly anarchic.

Until recently philosophers had looked upon ethics or moral philosophy (which would cover examination of the variety of systems of moral rules and practices mostly in their Western textual locations) as the weaker link (a "girlie subject," as it used to be called in Anglo-Australian faculties[1]) in the philosophical hierarchy. Curiously, ethics or moral philosophy was also looked upon as an abstract preoccupation, not unlike logic, linguistics, or epistemology, that has since antiquity been in quest of its own secure foundations, axioms, arguments, validation criteria, and so on. Thus departmentalized philosophy in the academe, which also claimed a certain prerogative over this armchair pursuit, looked rather suspiciously when the outside world knocked on its doors to seek the philosophers' direct involvement in real day-to-day problems or moral dilemmas and the general ethical confusion bedeviling people. Do philosophers care if a CNN reporter does not use a freshman's Aristotelian syllogism, let alone the advance semantic-deductive modal logic they have been working on, to arrive at a conclusion on some incident concerning, say, a public personality? In any case, the endless disputes in the world of an ethics overwhelmed by culturally diverse or opposing and tensed views on what is obligatory, right, and good, seem irreconcilable.

Still, it would appear that two developments have helped put ethics, as it were, firmly back on the map in recent times: the revival of classical moral thinking (including whole new approaches to reading Aristotelian ethics, virtue ethics, stoicism, as well as Kant's moral and aesthetic critiques) and, more significantly, the forays made into the broader academe from the side of applied or practical ethics that have taken upon its mantel wider ethical confrontations, ranging from the more mundanely practical spheres of human treatment of animals to bioethical concerns. Without a modicum, if not a heavy dose, of ethical theory (even if it is often neatly disguised for public presentation), such questions as, "How should one live responsibly?", "What values are we to have?", "Why should I be moral or behave in a certain way (in my own private life, toward animals, toward other human beings, or toward the unborn and future generations, etc.)?" would fall flat, and in any event would have achieved no more than the transitory attention confined to culinary or journalistic insights and pursuits in popular culture. A good example of such rigorous theorizing is the highly influential gospel on animal liberation by my Australian colleague-friend Peter Singer (now relocated

to Princeton, sparking off some controversy as a new public intellectual voice in popular U.S. media), who in recent years has gone on to artfully tackle, in very practical and accessible terms, some of our century's most difficult and daunting bioethical challenges, which center around the prolonged suffering of the elderly or terminally ill, disabled infants, genetic reproductive technologies, responsible living, ecological and environmental degradation, developmental iniquities across the first and third worlds, and other such noble concerns.[2] Again, Singer's position is informed by preference utilitarianism, and to that extent it is rather controversial.

This turn in ethics has moved past the erstwhile concerns over the so-called fact-value distinction, where it was believed by some that one can legitimately derive an *ought* or value from an *is* or a state-of-affairs. A simple example of the latter would be making a rule or mandatory injunction of carrying a lethal weapon whenever there is a seeming threat in the environment to one's life. One might instead concern oneself with the consequences of carrying a lethal weapon and its potential or accidental misuse, or look at other ways of dealing with the perceived threat, perhaps through some nonviolent means. The question of individual agency, responsibility, and the intrinsic worth of the action with an eye to the consequences become crucial considerations. Another outcome of this rejection of the fact-value distinction, upon which Kant insisted, is that no individual human being should be looked upon as just a means but also as an *end* in his or her own right; and that human life is not reducible to a set of *facts* from or toward which we tailor certain moral behavior and laws to keep the order in some balance, but that there is a defined purpose, a *telos*, a higher end or greater good that life moves us toward. Some ethicists have attempted to extend this insight to the good of all sentient creatures, and to an extent to the planetary biocommunity as well.

Two things are to be kept in mind at this point of the discussion. One is that ethics can be a highly abstract, ahistorical, and metacritical or metanarrative pursuit inasmuch as the concerns remain within, as it were, the bounds of theory and are expressed in the form of stories about the motivation or reasons for which someone has thought doing *x* was right and doing *y* was wrong, or vice versa, and such considerations as might change one's thinking about the theory or presuppositions involved. Second, ethics can also become a very practical concern, grounded in day-to-day dilemmas that demand close attention to the lived context and conditions through which moral thinking per force proceeds or through which it *ought* to proceed, for otherwise the consequences would be too onerous and no theory (*meta-écrit*) could be summoned up for rescue.

I too have been challenged, under the self-confessed shadow of a galaxy of recent thinkers such as Singer, and in a similar vein, Max Charlesworth, A.J.C. Coady, Vandana Shiva, Ramchandra Gandhi, Veena Das, Ashis Nandy, Gayatri Spivak, bell hooks, and others, to shift my gaze now and then to a plethora of

practical issues, most usually in the context of the Indian subcontinent and its dispersed diasporas. The gravity and global (or transnational and globalizing) scale of these problems would tend to render insignificant, in one cognitive hemisphere of the intelligentsia at least, questions about the morality of saints and mystics or the broader question of the ethical boundaries traversed, perversed, inversed, subversed, and conversed that appear to have gained special and formidable attention in the area of studies we might call "comparative mysticism." Often, however, what is called comparative mysticism spearheaded in the erstwhile fields of phenomenology of religion or the history of religions has itself followed the model of the abstract, highly transcendentalized metacritique that remains largely ahistorical, noncontextual, and abstractly universal or prescriptively universalizing in its quest for the all-encompassing "mystical experience" or a philosophy that would tie up the motley myriad of differing experiences and claims into one neat template. Presented in this way, comparative—or the "perennial"—mysticism of scholars such as W.T. Stace leaves very little room for ethical interjections, as one seems prevented from pointing to any particular instance or specific conduct that one might wish to problematize or connect to some troubling everyday reality in the lives of ordinary people. In other words, the glass-ceiling limits or boundaries that are unwittingly embedded in the theory itself make the discourse entirely self-referential (as when a mirror reflects back the image or icon placed in front of it). The claim is not that all mystical discourses are of this nature, but, as some of the articles in this volume set out to demonstrate, mystical discourse has tended to take this route of late.

Nevertheless, there are also significant issues that arise in this conversation, apart from some timely historical reviews that cross-boundary investigation always throws up. For those interested in mystical discourses per se, the approach of bringing certain ethical questions to bear on the claims within mysticism proves to be a novel way of unpacking or deconstructing some of the claims that a religious discourse or theological analysis is not able to do, simply perhaps because such questions may not have arisen as significant concerns within that field, or because the concerns are of a different theoretical order. The appealing beauty and ground-breaking achievement of the present volume of essays is that it does precisely that: it raises questions from a position that a discourse may not have entertained, particularly in the discourse's ahistorical formulation (which, of course, might not have been the basis of its own formation in the phenomenological or experiential sense as it has come down through the lived traditions engaged in such phenomenon). In other words, what mystics experience and do and how they have each in their varied tradition come to possess such insights, claims, or doctrines may not be transparent in the theories that have grown up around these phenomena. So there is an imperative and a sense in which one needs to return, as it were, to the formative "facts," to the historical contexts, and to tracking the lives, the behavior, and the conduct of the actors or participants concerned away

from abstractions or exoticization or indeed romanticization about these realities, which constitute some of the more common faults that we have been told about with deafening persistence elsewhere in the academe through the charges of orientalism, occidentalism, colonialism, universalism, essentialism, and transcendentalism. Here the volume as a whole is itself a welcome discursive intervention, and the editors have done well to conceive its overall format in that light.

From another angle, an inquiry such as this also presents interesting questions to the moral philosopher, whose task it is not simply to sit in judgment or arbitrate between the ethical rights and wrongs of the practices, traditions, high theories or whatever that have developed in the course of these pursuits. Rather, the calling here is to think and rethink the terms, perhaps even the cultural limits of the discourse of ethics qua ethical/moral thinking, in respect to what I referred to above as metaethics, or what it means to say that something is right or wrong, good or bad, moral or evil, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on. Do I have a *meta*ethics for mysticism? I feel disconcerted, as this question had never quite occurred to me in this form! In other words, from yet another quarter, one is challenged to go back to the drawing board and begin to worry about what on earth (or in other possible worlds) is this thing called *ethics*, whose breath (*prāṇa*), pronouncements (*nirṇaya*), and supposedly objective and presumably established, indeed canonical and authoritative, status is being invoked to decide on certain issues that are not themselves the necessary constituents or perhaps recognizably the central points of the pursuits and practices, nor necessarily of the theories around which they have been woven. This has typically been the case with much of the philosophical theology of mysticism, where the concerns have been largely confined to whether the ultimate experience is extroverted or introverted, of a monist, nondual, or a plural kind, and so on.[3] But what would be the foundations of such an ethic? The burden and discourse of our responsibilities can blind us to larger issues confronting or challenging us in other ways, or from more enlightened positions. I feel that I have been, at least on this issue, in a somewhat similar safe and secure boat drifting along with my gaze more firmly set toward the transcendentalist possibilities than toward a concern about how to negotiate the turbulent currents every inch of the way on precisely the kinds of moral terrain with which this volume seeks to confront us—or hermetically shock us. Hence the importance of such a collection of essays cannot be underrated for shaking scholars, such as myself, out of this complacency and prompting us to pause, as it were, in that space of the *différence*.

Let me now move to the second task I have envisaged. I will begin with this question: Is there a fixed, transcendentalized understanding or foundational system of ethics per se? The question being posed is this: Is it possible to conceive of an ethics that neatly crosses the boundaries of histories and cultures and intrareligious developments, and which radically places itself at a safe remove or

distance from all historical genealogy of the moral discourse anywhere and everywhere, without as it were dirtying its hands? Is such a grounding of ethics affordable and possible? This is considered by some philosophers to be the first question of philosophy proper before its application—or *practicum*—to the wide range of human phenomena. If an edifice does not have a solid foundation, then how can it uphold or support any other pillars and propositions? This question took on a particular force with the rise of modernity, which also determined the direction and mode in which any answer to such a question would be taken seriously. And indeed, in the present volume, the tail-end of the framework of the Enlightenment ethics is presupposed in a large measure when these scholars examine the complex relationships between ethics and mysticism. Few scholars before the Enlightenment would have thought of a disquisition focusing on the "ethical status" of mysticism, as distinct from looking to mysticism—on a par with tradition's gaze toward God, scriptures, and prophets—for a source or origin of ethics.[4] One can liken the ironic paradox to Voltaire, or St. Simeon-on-the-sky-ladder, or the disenchanted rabbinical scholars, who all, like the Mīmāṃsakas in India, turned the magistrate's hammer on God Himself. Each of these individuals or groups, in the wake of certain historic events in the life of their community or the sheer persistence of horrendous dimensions of evil, were prompted to question the depth of the divine moral intentionality. Caught in these paradoxes generated by such theodical dilemmas, it was no longer an oxymoronic exercise to wonder what a morally banal Father the Giver of the Law might have turned out to be![5] Unless one accepts that there are moral constraints upon God, which either come from God himself or that are necessary for a higher truth, the paradox remains and is even perhaps exacerbated if we replace God with mystical experience as the overall inspirational source and authority of morality itself, as indeed some traditions have attempted to argue. This is one way of problematizing the issue at hand, and so we need to return to the question of the roots of ethics.

Which, Where, and the Nature of Ethics

One only has to pick up tomes on the history of ethics spanning the last two hundred years or so to appreciate the diversity, the intricacy, and the controversial, changing landscape of the field of ethics in the West, as well as the equally bewildering variety or rivalry of ethical positions in non-Western traditions. Medieval philosophers developed but also transformed most of the moral thinking they had inherited from the ancients; and all this was to be rapidly overhauled within a 200-year period with the advent of the Enlightenment in Europe, especially with the pens of thinkers such as Rousseau, Locke, Hume, Kant, and the Mills. In fact, moral thinking in modern times has remained under the domination of one or the other major strands of an Enlightenment-driven agenda of freeing ethics from its erstwhile theological and ecclesiastical involvement in

order to make it more responsive to the well-being of individuals and the community within a determined set of humanly defined goals or goods.

This has been a hallmark of modernity, where the question of the highest good or well-being of the individual and community is settled by *reason* and not by faith or some set of ascetic or spiritual pursuits. One might call this secular moral realism. Since individuals live and grow in a complex system of relations with other human creatures, notions such as virtue, social ethic, pleasure, harm, love, sympathy, civil entitlement, privilege, and so on emerge as the touchstones of such an ethics once it has been separated from its transcendental mystical idealism and theological dimensions. This is not to say, of course, that the two approaches—reason and mysticism—cannot be compatible or made to interact, but such interaction emerges usually as an afterthought or as a result of reform within a threatened paradigm, as when the Thomists and the scholasticism of medieval Christendom responded to the earlier dominance of the ecclesiastical morality of the "Dark Ages," or, in the Indian subcontinent, when the Buddha, Jainism's Mahavira, and the *Mahābhārata* reacted to an outworn Brahmanical sacrificial ethics.

In other times and places, revivals of even more unsettling varieties of ethical positions occurred, ranging from the austere asceticism of the Stoics to ethical hedonism (based on Epicurean and Phyrronic tendencies of living for the pleasures of the day), altruism (doing good to others), free-willing egoism (self-interested freedom), its rivals in determinism (mechanistic preset behavioral causes), pessimism, transcendentalism, and naturalism (drawing from Natural Law and the rise of Social Darwinism).[6] The controversies and alternative approaches that arose within the individualist-sensitive ethics of the modern period in the Anglo-European landscape introduced positions and shifts of often incommensurable kinds. It created problems and tensions between traditional or premodern patterns of understanding ethics and modernity's ethical focus on the rational individual as its starting point and its consequent denial of the metaphysical web of a bygone era.

The present volume struggles with the tension between tradition or premodern developments in mysticism that did not problematize ethics—or perhaps not sufficiently—and a modernity that remains suspicious of the traditional modes of being and thinking. A third player that I am trying to gesture into the fray is postmodernism, which in turn questions modernity's self-assured faith in its own method of grounding ethics, whether that grounding is accomplished via reason or propositional statements or scientific realism or analysis and argumentation. Postcolonial theory, for example, questions the legacy of imperialism and colonialism, examining how ruthless political systems are imposed on other cultures, resulting in the destruction of indigenous resources for self-understanding, religious perceptions and moral systems.[7] Postmodernism (along with feminism, a/theology, and postcolonial theory) might even permit a recall or retrieval of

some aspects of premodern insights and wisdom and, as the twenty-first century progresses, leave certain inquiries open-ended without the kind of *foreclosure* one tends to see forced upon us by modernity's haste. This again links to the heuristic of the "gap" or *différence* in which I locate my own reflections (without, of course, necessarily identifying myself as an icon-carrying postmodernist).

Hence the reflections and narratives traversed in the present volume on the question of mysticism will necessarily form part of this emerging discourse in contemporary ethics, for until now mysticism has been considered to be of marginal interest, warranting at best minor reference in works on ethics (and that too linked only to the question of the morality inherent or articulated in the great traditions—Christian ethics, Islamic ethics, Buddhist ethics, Indian ethics, and so on). I myself have been guilty of this oversight.[8] And I reject the Enlightenment belief that mystics, like "raw men" (i.e., natural human beings without fully developed rational capacities), are incapable of agency and thus are unable to master a genuine sense for the moral.[9] Consequently, I am keen to see mysticism returned to a more central stage in discussions on ethics or morality in *all* its ramifications, or at least to see ethics serve the role of a limiting or constraining factor within mysticism, which has happily been the thrust of this volume.

Ethical Minimalism

Nevertheless, it seems significant in such an enterprise to keep the questions of foundations, legitimation, justification, and the history of the changes undergone in ethical theories somewhere in our minds—lest we lose sight of that which is presupposed without due attention—as we proceed to the important work of making ethical reflections on the phenomenon and attendant practices of mysticism. As mentioned above, there is frequently a discontinuity between the project of philosophical foundational ethics and the practical implementation of ethics in everyday life. We need to remind ourselves constantly of the kinds of assumptions, occlusions, and ellipses that can occur when we theorize on the philosophical foundations of ethical reflection, especially where the borderzones of time, space, and several continents are being crossed. This is, if you will, the burden of the hermeneutic of ethics.

So what I have done thus far in a rather schematic manner is to raise some general issues and metaquestions about what it means to appeal to "ethics," "the ethical," "moral," and so on as one seeks to apply ethical standards, criteria, and judgments across another boundary. We need not fear the anxieties of relativism and alleged postmodernist ethical anarchism in asking these questions, for it is possible to settle on one theory of ethics over others if we are prepared to provide adequate reasons and arguments for such a determination. A complete account of ethics is neither necessary nor possible at this stage in world scholarship, short of noting resemblances, points of agreement, and mutual reinforcements on certain basic virtues and values across the wide tapestry of ethical thinking any-

where. Does any tradition, for instance, deny universal love, unabashedly valorize the baseless killing of living creatures, withdraw compassion and sympathy for the suffering, afflicted and dead, and so on? Even the most difficult moral situations have quite often been resolved in practical ways, and remarkable degrees of convergence have been discovered when attempts have been made to discern the basic issues that arise again and again across quite different traditions and cultures.

In other words, ethical insights can emerge from a number of different quarters, and they need not be confined to a single tradition of moral thinking. Whatever the source of the insights or ethical intuition, one must be able to articulate, argue, and defend with good reason, and be reflexive about one's presupposition, position, and judgments without betraying the dogmatism that was so characteristic of bygone eras. Since the present volume is conceived, largely composed, and put together by writers trained and, in the majority of the cases, still living in United States who are addressing traditions that are not always their own (spatially or temporally), it is an interesting question for me to see how the question of ethics (in as it were its "pure" or abstract form) is handled and operative here (both in terms of the values enshrined, the judgments or moral reflections made, *and* the grounds, structure, and semantics of the moral pronouncements proffered). But I also feel deeply for the effort and authenticity with which this task has been carried out in this unique volume. It gives me confidence that the history of mysticism (located within the broader framework of the history of religions or comparative philosophy) is mature enough for this encounter, and I am very positive about the achievements of practical ethics in this area as well.

A Mystical Origins of Ethics?

One other question that I touched on above has been raised by this volume: Is ethics *possible* (in the originary sense) within the practices or discourse of mysticism? In other words, might one look for the mystical-transcendental origins of ethics—in the manner in which Kant looked to ground his ethics in a reformed Protestant metaphysics? Or as Hindus looked to the insights of the Vedic seers (*ṛṣis*) with their proclivity toward an enigmatic cosmic order (*ṛta*)? Or as the Buddha derived the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path from his own deeply felt analytical insight into the unfelicitous fact of suffering, pain, human corruptibility, old age, and death? Wittgenstein, in contrast, wondered whether ethics was even possible. For Wittgenstein, ethics was transcendental—hence the *transcendentiality* of ethics—that is, morality is difficult to "see," articulate, or pronounce with self-assured conviction and is therefore manageable only as an intensely inner, personal wisdom. Mysticism, in other words, may be a case apart, both historically and conceptually, as the counterpositive to the ruse of instrumental reason in the quest for ethics and its foundations.

More pertinently, Max Weber alerted a modernizing world to the inevitable secularization of the globe, a trend that in turn would disturb the uncritical acceptance of modernization itself. Weber predicted the increasing force of legal rational authority—or secular ethics—that has come to characterize modern societies, in bureaucracy as much as in the scholarly world. As Weber might have predicted, the uneasiness and critiques that have come from such quarters as feminism, minority groups, ethnic identity politics, and indigenous self-determination claims have created further tensions, ambiguities, and uncertainties within the reigning paradigm of modernity. In the context of the present volume, all of the above critiques of modernity lead me to wonder what would happen if we focused our attention not just on the ethical status of mysticism, but also on the mystical status of ethics.

Perhaps it is best that I leave this question to the next generation of scholars. Before I do, however, I offer one simple plea: mysticism need not find itself suddenly in the defendant's stand simply because in earlier periods it functioned as an authoritative testimony (*āptavacana)* and advocate of first philosophy, that is, of ethics. Nevertheless, if mysticism fails to deliver the moral goods, if it does not prompt ethics to evolve, and/or if it does not help the contemporary world to overcome the blind spots of bygone ethics (e.g., racism, sexism, speciesism, homophobism, and the perpetuation of poverty through the exploitation, denial, and consumerist globalization of the other), then the criticisms advanced by some thinkers in the present volume are more than justified.

Questioning the Morality of Mysticism

The opening essays of Part I raise a major question, as outlined in the Introduction: Can mysticism and mystical experiences be a source for grounding morality? In other words, in a way similar to Iris Murdoch, who looked to mystically drenched philosophical narratives as a source for the moral life, can mysticism act in such a way as to provide a metaphysical base for morality? The editors make it clear that mysticism is not ethics, and that ethics is not mysticism in any straightforward, nonproblematic way. Mysticism and ethics may be related, but the question remains how to trace this relation as it has worked itself out in the course of history and the evolution of human life. The ensuing debate engages this question by focusing on a major issue, namely, whether monistic (usually nontheistic or pantheistic) mystical systems have yielded an ethical framework that is superior to dualistic (usually monotheistic) mystical systems, or whether both have suffered from immense deficiencies in this regard. The finer details of the analysis turn on issues such as the erasure of the ego and, with it, the autonomy of the agency as well, particularly in doctrinal systems that command complete subservience of the individual to the *authority* of a larger whole. As Kripal points out correctly, without individual agency it is a mockery to speak of moral behavior. Moreover, in reaction to this loss of ego and agency, alienated and ambiguated

individuals may resort to various sublimated expressions of gratification or defense reactions that end up creating more psychological tensions within the community rather than resolving the great questions of ontology, metaphysics, and theology. In effect, the erasure of the ego comes prematurely, and so disastrously.

This is an important psychoanalytic insight with which the editors have challenged the contributing authors as they each think through mysticism in the context of the historical realities in which this discourse has evolved. One might retort, however, that what appears to be an erasure of the ego and denial of human agency in respect to the other is merely a device for catalyzing self-transformation and the improvement of character, that it leads to inner evolution, and that in fact (as the Buddhist may argue) this dissolution of ego structures leads to the greater good in the long run. As both Kripal and Barnard in their own fashions go on to ask, however: Do mystical pursuits *necessarily* lead to positive ethical transformations in one's behavior? And if so, is it possible to determine whether this positive self-transformation enhances social or community well-being beyond the self-interest of the individual concerned? These two ways of coming at the problematics of the relation between the mystical and the ethical can pull in opposite directions, and each will appear to provide a persuasive answer. A closer look, however, reveals certain difficulties. For example, the sheer presence of evil in the world makes a sanguine mystical ontology difficult to sustain. Seen from this perspective, an ethics that concerns itself with individual transformation through arduous mystical training has no basis or is a form of self-deception.

Kripal develops a sophisticated articulation of this position predicated on human agency as an indispensable ingredient in ethics, as he examines the work of certain representative scholars in the twentieth century, namely, Albert Schweitzer, R.C. Zaehner, Arthur Danto, James Horne, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (with references also to Vivekananda, Deussen, Paul Hacker, Nicholas Gier, and Lance Nelson). Kripal inscribes the strongest, boldest articulation in the volume of the *pūrvapakṣa* or adversarial position, one that pits itself against the established claim (*siddhānta)* that mysticism produces good people, ethical traditions, and morally workable cultures. He does so by pointing out that this has not been the case in historical reality. Here Kripal is continuing a mode of philosophizing and scholarly engagement that has been attested to in the hoary Indian tradition. This philosophical strategy gives voice to the opponent's position and then, through a series of sharp analyses, criticism, and *reductio ad absurdum* arguments, deconstructs the received wisdom, including those views that might appear to support the *pūrvapakṣin*'s position but for wrong or ill-conceived reasons. Thus Kripal cites Danto and Horne, who claim that the very idea of "monism," on which much of the Hindu mystical tradition appears to have been based, is incoherent and ontologically impoverished, and that it also flies in the face of everyday, normative experience. Kripal's response is that monism is rigorously coherent and

ontologically profound, but that it has other problems that place constraints on its viability as a feasible ethical system in the contemporary world. Kripal thinks it is important to make these distinctions and not to conflate the two different perspectives on metaphysics and ethics. Kripal primarily confines his examination to the monistic traditions (i.e., the various forms of monism and unqualified nondualism, especially those that stem from the eighth-century Brahmanic commentator, Śaṅkara). Initially, I was curious why the medieval bhakti tradition with its variations on the Upaniṣadic theme of monism, especially the qualified nondualist metaphysics of Rāmānuja, Madhva, and Vallabhācārya, were not covered. But twentieth-century debates appear to have gone precisely in this monistic direction. Thus Kripal in his reflections on the dominant twentieth-century discussions on Indian mysticism provides what he calls an "Indological Map" in tracking the "twentieth-century Indological debates on the socio-ethical implications of the mystical as the monistic." I believe this marks the beginnings of a very interesting research program that is likely to engage Indological scholars well into the new millennium. Following this model, scholars will do well to supplement the present inquiry by examining other scholars, such as Dasgupta, Staal, Matilal, Gonda, Sengupta, and Perrett, among others, who have worked on the relationship between Hindu mysticism, logic, and ethics. One has to acknowledge, however, the fact—to which Kripal also draws our attention—that the Western tendency to see Hinduism as primarily monistic is a particular interpretation of the Hindu life-world that was promoted since the early nineteenth century by German romantic writers commentating on newly discovered Indian philosophical texts, particularly the Upaniṣads. This certainly is not all of Hinduism, and no one nowadays believes it to be the case (despite the fact that new "nonorientalist" translations of the Upaniṣads are produced in the West every ten years). Thus, without a close rereading of Rāmānuja and Caitanya's *bhakti-vedānta* fusion as the backdrop, Radhakrishnan's defense of the ethical nature of monistic Hindu mysticism is not likely to be appreciated. But then how much mileage can one get out of defensive and apologetic tracts, as distinct from the clarity discovered in the original articulations and primary texts?

Barnard also addresses the ethical implications of the absent of "a real agent and real other" in his critical reading of Hacker's depiction of the ethical flaws of monism. If one takes the Hacker-logic seriously, it would appear that, apart from the few moral injunctions that feature as a preparatory repertoire, ethics is all but absent in Advaita Vedānta. Very real difficulties arise, however, when one attempts to separate ethics from its Western moorings and apply it wholesale to another culture. Some people claim that ethics is a modern Western construct and that, as such, it is pointless to attempt to trace ethics as a historical "given" in other traditions. Others argue that different traditions have their own ethical moorings, and that it is not always easy or proper to be blinded by defects in the system without paying close attention to the values, virtues, and moral force these

traditions might be promoting in their adherents by whatever methods, the mystical life included.

But there are writers who step outside all traditions and attempt to articulate a transcendental vision of the connection between the mystical and ethical. W.T. Stace in his quest for a perennialism or essentialization of monism across all religions promoted a kind of stuporic complacency, and in my view—here I agree with Kripal—contributed little of value to the debate. Kripal's essay, then, is an understandable reaction to this kind of detached moralism. Danto offers a similar response with his critique of Hinduism, which claims that it offers an amorally bankrupt ontology, since it preaches a life of escapism from the world, a way of life that, in turn, is entailed by its allegedly defective "factual" picture of the universe. In this view the *Gītā* is veritably an inhuman tract, one that does not care about human beings or their real conditions of suffering, in the sense that Krishna would sooner have one kill than heal. Seen in this light, the *Gītā*'s teaching, if it is representative of Hindu philosophy, is peculiarly immoral.

On the face of it, it is hard not to agree with the overall sentiment of Danto. To his credit, Danto also has used Nietzsche's deconstruction of Christian moralism and its ill-fated defense in Kant's deontological or rule-based ethics, to good effect, against Indian ethics (although Danto does not share Nietzsche's sympathy for the comparably less-enervating Buddhist ethics). Both of these thinkers, it should be remembered, are writing for the West, warning against the wholesale appropriation of Indian thought for Western sensibilities. The difficulty with Danto's position, however, is that he does not give arguments as to why his paradigm of ethics, which is inexorably tied to Western pragmatism, is more justified than one by which the tradition might wish to judge itself (he does, however, argue against deontological ethics generally). Barnard points to Danto's "philosophical arrogance," and I think it is generally agreed in the volume that Danto might not be the most helpful gatekeeper and guide to this debate.

By far the more decisive assault comes from the painstaking scholarly work of R.C. Zaehner. And it is refreshing to see a rapidly fading icon in comparative mysticism being revisited in some depth. But Zaehner's work is not without controversy. Any scholar of Hinduism knows that Zaehner betrayed a particular bias toward monotheism (hence it is not surprising that his annotated translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* remains out of print),[10] and that he tried to underscore the excesses of mysticism across the Eastern (and comparable Western) cultures by indulging in hallucinogenic experiments (which Kripal recounts) and commenting at length on the Charles Manson debacle. That he became increasingly pessimistic about the promises of a spiritual-mystical worldview (while remaining a nominal convert to Roman Catholicism) was possibly a reflection of his own inner turmoil and the debauched reclusiveness of an Oxford don's life.[11] (When I reached All Souls College, it was still rumored that the angular "R.C." found his spirit in the proverbial bottle, and that he died alone of a heart attack after col-

lapsing on the pavement as he ambled his way to the church one lazy Sunday morning.)

Kripal, however, is more circumspect than Zaehner in that he prefers to hold Hindu mysticism and ethics in some tension. He explores this third space in the freewheeling mysticism of Agehananda Bharati. While Bharati denounces the puritanical "inane" ethicism of Hindu philosophy along with its equally troubling metaphysics, he is interested in underscoring the neglected Hindu Tantra and affirming an ontology-free mysticism. Nevertheless, Bharati was a staunch believer in the truth of Advaita (nondual metaphysics) even as he appealed to reason, which he wanted to see developed in the context of a Tantric hedonistic ethics. In this context "Swami" (Bharati's revered appellation) trekked all the way to Śrīṅgerī in southwest India to have the *darshan* (sight-blessing) of Chandraśekhara Bhāratī, the dethroned pontifical head of the Śrīṅgerī Math (which traces its lineage back to Śaṅkara). Chandrasekhara Bhāratī had been kept behind locked doors because he acted strangely, seemingly on the verge of madness, and could no longer contain his intense, excitable, and single-minded love and devotion for Sāradāmmā, the goddess that adorns Śrīṅgerī's main shrine. Chandrasekhara did not separate the mystical from the moral, and he did not know what to do with the erotic affect that emerged in the space in between the two. Ostracized by his own institution and by institutionalized Hinduism, he extinguished his sufferings in the flowing currents of the nearby Thuṅgabhadra River, never to breathe again. Bharati thought Chandrasekhara was exemplary, and he encouraged modern Hindus to find a nonterminal solution to the latter's haunting predicament.[12]

Kripal bases much of his more concrete argumentation on the lives of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, who come out of Bengal and whose impact on modern Hindu self-understanding has undoubtedly been immense, as has the impact of Gandhi's nonviolent ethic across distant shores. Although Ramakrishna and Vivekananda cannot be assumed to represent all of the vast nearly three millennia of development in the Hindu tradition, they are nonetheless paradigmatic figures and provide exemplary models on how the tradition has crystallized some of its own dilemmas.[13] I agree with Kripal when he argues that the Upaniṣadic dictum *tat tvam asi* ("You are That") cannot easily be interpreted to mean "God is in everyone," especially if God, within a dualistic theology, is closer to a monotheistic conception than to a monistic Absolute. Kripal could have also fruitfully contrasted this understanding with the thought of Rāmānuja and Madhva. These thinkers, after all, were more ethically oriented precisely because they kept the question of alterity—that is, a perspective on the other (whom Śaṅkara reduces to a "that" or *idam*)—foremost in their minds. This stress on otherness prompted them both to introduce restrictions and qualifications into the sweeping all-encompassing embrace of Śaṅkara's nondualist metaphysics and its emphasis on *māyā* or "illusion." Without these ontological qualifications where embodiment

of both the self and the other are taken seriously, a viable ethical system does not work well with the *tat tvam asi* trope developed by Western interpreters of the Upaniṣads. Quasi-pantheistic systems, such as those of Bergson, Spinoza, James, and Underhill, permit one to say something similar, and so their ontology would not necessarily be in tension with their ethics. Likewise, the mystical intuitions of intimate but still dialectical union that are expressed in various traditions across time and place also offer ethically viable metaphysical positions, as several of the essays have powerfully brought out, for example, the essays on Kabbalah (Wolfson), Sufism (Sells), Taoism (Kohn), and Zen (Loy).

As for Ramakrishna's mystically inspired metaphysics, perhaps the saint was indeed far too involved in his own mystical experiences to become embroiled in the broader ethical social issues. Ramakrishna's responses to Brahmo-inspired reformists such as Rammohan Roy, Vidyāsāgar, and Bankim on their reservations about the social usefulness of Ramakrishna's austere teachings sound horrendous to our contemporary ears, which are so sensitive to socioeconomic issues. On the face of it, Ramakrishna's position appears to be amoral and seems to advocate a refusal to take responsibility for life's problems. One might wonder, though, whether Ramakrishna's rhetoric does not actually appeal to the transcendentiality of ethics. Perhaps Ramakrishna is attempting to foreshadow for the seeker certain experiences and disillusionments in the world before she or he settles with conviction on a more typically moral "form of life." A distinction is often made in religious ethics between values that are fundamental (i.e., those that are immutable and obligatory), those that are contingent and culture-specific (such as protectionist and implemental processes, with variable retributive or rehabilitative actions), and those that are instructional (such as the style of teaching one adopts, the language one speaks, and the clothing one wears). Not all evidence or testimony heard in a court of law (religious or secular) will fall neatly into any one or the other category. In much the same way, Ramakrishna was a master teacher, and his instructional devices were not always intended to press home a fundamental (moral) point. I would at least wish to grant something of this hermeneutic of ethical doubt and purposeful duplicity to a saint of such a stature, given the time period and the surrounding environment in which he lived. It is as important to acknowledge the limits of moral philosophy as it is to overextend its scope and reach. Moreover, he would not be the first mystic-ascetic to behave outwardly in a way commensurate with the intuition that there are limits to moral philosophy. So I might be less convinced about Ramakrishna's alleged amoralism than I am about Hacker's suggestion that Vivekananda both mollified and modified the Advaitic vision of *tat tvam asi* through the influences of Deussen, Schopenhauer, and Christian teachings. Ramakrishna was a complicated personality, and I shall refrain from commenting on his Tantric dispositions, especially since these have already been analyzed by other scholars, including Kripal. Still, I applaud the motivations of sincere researchers such as Kripal

who have been concerned to bring to the forefront controversial aspects of a mystical "form of life" that otherwise would remain buried, occluded, and forgotten behind the celebratory and nostalgic mood that often prevails in hagiographies in the place of critical-analytical historiographies.

I too have been unsparingly critical of Śaṅkara's austere reading of the "I" and "You" in the *Brahmasūtra* (which crystallizes, by one theory at least, the teachings of the Upaniṣads).[14] The critique I bring to bear draws to an extent on the psychoanalytic trope of transference (for *adhyāsa*), buttressed by a Levinasian-Sarvodaya (Gandhi's universal welfare) principle that gives primacy of place to the other in the face of Infinity (read, *Brahman*). I castigate Śaṅkara for denying personal agency altogether and for erasing the location of other-regarding ethics by transimposing the impersonal (*apauruṣeyatva*) nature of the Absolute and Revelation (*śruti*) on to embodied existence (which Śaṅkara identifies as "nonbeing" or "nonself" or simply "that," *idam*) beyond certain obligatory yogic constraints (*niyamas*). Specifically, I argue that the sensitivity to the complexity of the embodied life, along with its layers of the nonconscious and subtle inner perturbations and motivations, have echoed better in the insights of Yoga, Rāmānuja, and the *bhakti* traditions, as well as in certain imperatives that have come to our attention in postcolonial deconstruction (e.g., redressing problems of caste violence, women's oppression, communalism). This is not a disagreement with the editors and contributors to the volume, but a reinforcement of the main mission that inspired this volume, namely, that of developing aspects of mystically inspired metaphysics and analysis in the area where they have been the weakest, namely, in the *ethical regard for the other.* This equally Augustinian, Franciscan, Sufi, Confucian, and Buddhist note rings through clearly in several of the essays.

Would India, then, have been better off adopting the Buberian "I-thou" social mysticism? Gandhi thought so and confessed as much in his correspondence with Buber. Hence in so developing their respective insights, native spokespersons may well appropriate Western (Judeo-Christian) philosophical doctrines into their own indigenous philosophical systems (see chapters 1 and 6), or in turn give back hybridized positions from the borderlands which might provide new vistas on the West's own troubled spirituality. Subaltern studies scholars and developmental theorists who bank unflinchingly on human rights discourse, such as the second Bengali Nobel laureate (after Tagore) Amartya Sen, would insist on this; and indeed, it makes for a healthy and critical two-way traffic.

Some cultural critics, however, appeal to developments in Western modernization with its roots in Christian social philanthropy as a nonnegotiable supplement to India's moral problems. Gwilyn Beckerlegge, for example, poses these rhetorical questions: "Is it more appropriate, therefore, to consider Vivekananda's promotion of organised service as a response from one caught up in a modernisa-

tion process rather than a response primarily determined to 'Westernise' Hindu culture, or from one who had recognised that a deficiency in Hindu philanthropic activity could only be made good through the absorption of a Christian-derived social ethic?"[15] Beckerlegge rejects the implied option three, and Kripal veers toward the first option while keeping "all three processes in tension—modernization, Westernization, and Christianization."[16] In the context of secular modernization, the working of the reformist zeal in whichever of the three trajectories outlined above is inevitable (and it has been going on since the Hindu/Indian renaissance of the late eighteenth century). This may indeed be one way of combating the continuing communal violence in India, where politically sensitized Hindus attack Muslims and Christians instead of attending to the disadvantages suffered by minority and undercaste communities. The recent spate of communal violence in India makes this task even more urgent, and it points to the limits of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hindu ethics, which has remained tied too closely to philosophical mysticism. Until the twentieth century, Christianity was not the greatest bastion of social ethics either (one of those rare points upon which Radhakrishnan and Schweitzer could agree). Religious pluralism and ethical pluralism may have to go hand-in-hand if either side is to survive. This too appears to be the direction we are moving toward as earlier worldviews tend to breakdown or as collective moral amnesia sets in among advocates of the dominant theology. And indeed, a number of essays illustrate the kinds of exemplary, even if not socially engaged, lives a number of mystics have pursued, often at the risk of being ostracized, burnt, or destroyed along with their memories in other ways.

The Case for Moral Ambiguity, Antinomianism, and Beyond

Barnard picks up an interesting point in chapter 2 when he echoes a sentiment that Kant could not resist expressing, namely, that the world might be morally ambiguous. It is for this reason that Enlightenment philosophers retreated to the internal secure space of reason to protect human beings from the treacherous ambiguities they had to constantly negotiate. Some traditions, however, have not been that pessimistic, as they have viewed the universe as an ordered and highly structured reality, which sometimes we just get wrong. Mystics and seers thought they could unfathom the secrets of the universe, claims that are buttressed by mythic accounts narrated by their disciples extolling their special powers and privileges. This tension between moral ambiguity and moral certainty is illuminating in three brilliant essays on Western mysticism. The essay by Woods covers some of the lesser-known, pre-Enlightenment radical movements ("militant antinomianism") obliquely inspired by otherwise benign Free Spiriters, such as St. Amour, Marguerite Porete, William of Nangis, Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, and Henry Suso (most of whom were officially disgraced, if not executed). Woods comes to the following conclusion in his elegant survey:

> [R]adical antinomians, by assuming the role of rebels, religious or otherwise, anticipate and even attempt actively and often destructively to replace the traditional goals of society along with the conventional means of attaining them. Thus, ironically, by striking out at mystics (e.g., Porete, the beguines and beghards, Eckhart) . . . church and state authorities probably removed a source of influence that could have prevented or at least restrained the destructive violence of rebellions such as the reformist uprisings, peasants' revolts, and religious anarchies that bloodied Europe from the late thirteenth century through the early Reformation period.[17]

The history of nonconformity and antiliteralism in scriptural exegesis, heretical and antinomian (or perhaps hypernomian and transmoral, as Wolfson prefers it), occurs within another Abrahamic offshoot: the Kabbalah. These texts, filled with mystical interpretations of the Torah, take the axiological framework of law as their ethical center and offer a version of antidualism as their ontological base. According to Kabbalists, it is because the divine hyperreality is considered to be infused with wisdom (*hokhmah*) that morality is possible, or, alternatively, that gnosis and praxis are inseparable. The two levels at which kabbalistic wisdom operate (one antinomian and other nomian) recalls for us the two levels of reality and two-truths ideographs in philosophical Hindu and Buddhist tracts, as the zoharic engendered imagery of the eye recalls the *Ṛg Veda* passages on the all-seeing eyes of Prajāpati. The eschatalogical dimension of ethics hinted at here is probably what has come to haunt the West through the imagery of the other in the eye-face of Infinity in later-day modern Jewish writers, such as Benjamin, Levinas, Adorno, and their French counterparts in Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous. Gershom Scholem in his own subversive way belongs to this group as well, except that he stressed the antinomian potentiality of mystical experiences over its innovative and orderly dimensions, holding the two somehow in dialectical tension. Following Scholem, Wolfson also attempts to make links between talmudic-zoharic wisdom and social reform activism.

Sell's careful hermeneutical exegesis on Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī's transgressive encodings neatly deconstructs a rather conservative reading by Zaehner in his oft-cited work *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism.* Once again, Zaehner's bias comes through, namely, that monism necessarily destroys ethics because it lacks the love found in Christianity and in the modified nondualism of Rāmānuja. And woe to Sufism for having sullied itself with the self-same terminal waters of Vedāntic monism. But love is more pervasive in Sufism than Zaehner would like to admit. As Sells notes with a Levinasian twist, Sufism teaches that "[t]he gaze of love, in its infinite longing, both acknowledges and accepts the gaze of the other and, rather than seize on it as an object, passes through it to a common center of all the gazes."[18] And here Sells is perspicuous when he notes: "Neither eroticism nor

repression of the erotic serve as direct indicators of morality."[19] Indeed, as Barnard points out, one has to be alert to the ethical dangers or excesses of both dualistic and nondualistic thought. Zaehner failed to appreciate that within esoteric dimensions of Islam there is a strong emphasis and linkage of spiritual growth in the world of action with an inner, experiential awareness of morality, such that one's whole life becomes ethically nuanced. Sufism absorbed local cultures, from Morocco to Java, and this accounts for the differences in the expressions and outward veneer of Sufi mysticism. But Muslims remain open to the past and the challenges of new ethical and moral discoveries.[20]

Moving to the Buddhist tradition and looking for a framework of ethics in a non-Western philosophy, David Loy focuses on nondualism as an abstract ontology where one might fruitfully locate a framework of ethics in a non-Western philosophy. Here Loy struggles to answer the foundational questions that arise in any attempt to situate ethics in a generalized ontology of nondualism. Some schools of Buddhism have tended to reduce the awakening (*nirvāṇa)* to a purely detached *prajñā* or intellection process, while others have considered it to be linked to *śila* or ethical perfection. Either way, the same questions that Kripal asks of the constraints of Vedāntic or monistic (nondualistic) ethics would apply here as well, given that Loy also wants to appeal to nonconceptual primary experiences. In other words, where is the place and location of the other in this introspective process and its final goal of selfless release? Loy, following well-established Buddhist writers such as Rahula, de Silva, Masua Abe, and Suzuki, among others, emphasizes the social dimension of Buddhist ethics that integrates altruistic compassion with ontological nondifference and a sense of care for all sentient beings. These are shown not to be inconsistent tenets, particularly when Loy points out the development of character as well as the skill (*śila)* in practical actions that stems from the Buddhist ontological insight of nondualism.

But the obverse side to the precept-based and *śila*-perfecting virtues of loving-kindness, benevolence, compassion, sympathy, equanimity, self-restraint, sexual continence, and contentment is that historically there have been Buddhist schools and individuals who did not believe any act was necessarily evil or unethical, since supposedly there is no other than one's self to harm (the same logic can also justify killing a bad person as a means to free him or her).

Kohn likewise makes a strong case for Taoism's wisdom-filled approach to ordinary everyday moral issues and dilemmas. Transmoral normativity returns here also in her nuanced discussions of the differences between the complete amnesia or oblivion of mystical absorption, the Taoist ideal of complete psychological or emotional spontaneity (as in Zhuangzi), and the immense power that perfected sages have had to transform and reform societies against tyrannical regimes of kings and elites alike. Kohn works through interesting narratives drawn from Confucian, neo-Confucian, and philosophical Taoism to give us a picture of the extraordinary powers and acts of tremendous social presence that rulers

and sages could command, even if their behavior would often appear to be immoral by common standards. A metanarrative is required, however, which later commentators provide, in understanding the precise teleology of these actions, that is, the higher cosmic purpose they were intended to serve. The sage is merely an agency for nature that works through him to restore balance and bring about harmony in the order of things that at a higher level is inexorably good. The question that remains is how one can make sense of a mode of behavior or action that is detached from all feelings, emotions, and sentiments, as is the case with these sage-rulers. For, presumably, moral judgments are embedded in emotions, and certain mystical states are very emotional states as well (e.g., devotional and aesthetic moods), and we would hope to find ethics operative in this context as well. Why, we might ask, did the Chinese philosopher underemphasize this dimension of the moral life?

I never would have thought of seeing a lengthy treatment of Henri Bergson in a volume such as this, but as a philosopher in the technoscientific age who responds to the challenges of the secular worldview, he is an important figure to discuss. Rather than comment on Barnard's lucid depiction of Bergson's notion of the synthetic unity of inner time-consciousness as a form of mysticism, let me just remark on a moral implication of his metaphysics. Bergson lived at a time when racist theories about the superiority of the Aryans and European races were on the rise. Jews were being distinguished as an out-caste. One Finot rose to the occasion and denounced the valorization of this theory that was supposedly based on scientific findings, as argued by Lapouge, Spencer, and Fouille. Bergson, himself a Jew, stood steadfast in support of Finot, and this while putting his own philosophical reputation on the line (Finot was born Finklehaus, of Polish Jewish parents). This was a noble undertaking and provides evidence of a mystically and metaphysically inspired philosopher who lived according to his moral convictions.

Jonathan Shear's appeal to narrative ethics is another perspective on the morality of mysticism. Here the author comments on several different understandings of happiness (from Aristotle to Eastern conceptions) and addresses a few general questions I had raised earlier. For example, very early on, Indian people in their practical moral judgment included happiness on the side of the "good," along with health, survival, progeny, pleasure, calmness, friendship, knowledge, and truth, and they distinguished these from qualities that belong to the side of the "bad," such as misery, suffering, sickness, injury, death, pain, anger, enmity, ignorance, deceit, error, and untruth. It is remarkable how many traditions across the planet echo very similar sets of positive values and disvalues and the importance they attach to the moral end of happiness. But the *śrāmaṇic* or yogic traditions, to which the Upaniṣads, Buddhism, and Jainism are inextricably linked, place less emphasis on happiness in their "spiritual" worldview, commending instead ethical imperative of renunciation, a disciplined life, and the *dharma* con-

ducive to these principles. A monastic community was the preferred model, although a social life that aims to maximize this principle in a quasi-secular fashion (by the time of King Aśoka and the Chandragupta kings) was again emphasized. The life of the monk, particularly that of an *arhant*, *sannyāsin, guru, ācāryā,* or philosopher-ascetic who through his stoic practices has attained a "near-omniscient" state, becomes the normative standard for the layperson. In the deep mystical states such monks experienced, their inner spiritual realization appeared to transcend moral categories and social normative imperatives. Thus Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom Henri Le Saux), a Christian mystic who moved from Belgium to India and who was deeply influenced by Upaniṣadic thought, claimed in this degree of mystical realization of the Absolute that one does "not know either evil or suffering."

On a different note, Stoeber argues that mysticism can become a playfield for dilettantes and spiritual "voyeurs," charlatans and deceivers, creating ambiguity and antinomian narcissism in the minds of the ardent followers and observers alike. Much "hallo-ballo" or craziness takes place in ashram basements, and the sheer number of federal agency and litigious proceedings brought against spiritual "cults" and otherwise well-respected "swamis" and their orders in recent years in the West is enough to drive home the truth of Zaehner's charge regarding the "polymorphously perverse use of Eastern thought."[21] But Stoeber is not as pessimistic as Zaehner was, or Danto for that matter, for he considers such cases, epitomized in Charles Manson's macabre behavior, to be evidence of personal pathologies at play rather than spiritual influences. He supports his argument by providing narrative accounts that disconnect such borderline cases from traditional religious mysticism. This is a sobering inference, and I think there is some truth in this. Stoeber's quest for motivations on the part of a person's pursuit of the mystical path and ideals as well as his move to invite the engagement of religious studies with the larger social sciences as well as psychoanalytical methods of inquiry are also to be applauded.

It was something of a rude shock to read about Frithjof Schuon. Not being an ethnographer, I cannot make a judgment on how accurate some of the information is, and certainly the case against Schuon is made even more complex by the fact that it was thrown out of court. But the message is clear: not all mystics of the *philosophia perennis* school are what they appear; there are tricksters, third-eye-ball gyrating, and naked pretend-fakirs among them. The sad part for me is the hue this disclosure paints around the figure of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and perhaps even Seyyed Hossein Nasr, both of whom are often identified as iconic avatars of the lineage to which Schuon claims to belong. But I do not see that Urban would want to implicate the Coomaraswamys (much less Huston Smith or Danner) in the androgynic-orgasmic esotericism of Schuon.

The question is whether this is an aberration and an exception rather than a rule in the pantheon of mystical traditions and icons being scrutinized in this

volume. We tend only to remember the difficult cases that have lived on in our collective memory, while the good (ones), as Shakespeare reminded his audience, remain interred in the soil. It would be an insufferably dismal start to the new millennium if all or even a large fragment of mysticism across the many byways of history and cultures fell prey to the same *śrāmaṇic-naṅga* or naked austerity simulations of shamanic high priests. Any hope of linking ethics to mysticism would be dashed, and the answer to the question "What is the ethical status of mysticism?" would have to be a categorical "zilch." There would be no winners here. The volume as a whole, however, has not been constrained by this categorical pessimism, and it has at least shown that some of the earlier scholarly critiques of the effort to forge this link have themselves been subjected to criticism.

In concluding this disquisition and bringing my remarks to some sort of a closure, I would have to say the following: It is recognized that all traditions, great and little, vouchsafe a certain core package of values, virtues, and actions that constitute their moral world. But this much is uncontroversial in this volume as well. What is controversial and being debated is whether mysticism per se, within the disparate traditions, has always remained true to these moral perceptions, or whether mysticism has unabashedly flaunted them, creating more antinomian anxieties than it has been able to resolve without doing violence to itself. If the answer to the latter question is in the affirmative, a second important question then arises, namely, whether this immoral characteristic of mysticism is embedded in the nature and formative or deeper structure of the mystical worldview and its practices, or whether this is a result of accretions, pathological motivations, and misdirected deviations from its originary insights and intentions. A third question arises: Is morality integral and a prerequisite imperative for this form of life in all the traditions that espouse and commend it? The editors and authors are not unanimous in their responses to these and related questions. The overwhelming evidence is that something of the ethical status of mysticism can be redeemed, although there are cautionary caveats and constraints that need to be recognized. Times are also changing, and cultures are not closed to reviewing their own record and trajectories in these matters. The premodern world changed to make way for the modern world, and now postmodernism is upon us, although this trend too will no doubt come to pass in the new millennium, as will poststructuralism and subaltern and postcolonial studies (which are only just beginning to make a dent in religious studies and Asian studies). At least we can surmise that on the scholarly front the prospects are encouraging, that the frontiers or boundaries of this emergent field of discourse are expanding (which complements the more "pure" concerns with the structure and epistemology of mystical experience), and that the debate entertained between the covers of this volume has generated further questions that warrant a continuing dialogue between scholars

(and indeed practitioners and advocates also) of these traditions, as well as the occasional dose of reflective interjection of a metaethical kind.

Finally, allow me to recast a small well-known sermon of Walter Benjamin to the effect that our scholarly advances in the future can find encouragement and hope only by keeping a firm gaze on the past:

> The angels of scholarship cannot walk forward into history, but they do move on by walking backwards towards the future; and so there need not be the fear without hope, or foreclosure of the destiny left behind in the moments ahead.

Notes

1. In other words, the subject of inquiry was on a par with "domestic or home sciences" classes designed for girls for their terminal academic careers.
2. See, for example, the several articles in the *New York Times* and the profile "The Dangerous Philosopher" in the *New Yorker*, 6 September 1999.
3. Of course, the discussion on mysticism has moved to new terrains, such as the nature of consciousness in mystical states, or whether there is anything particularly distinctive and religious in mysticism which cannot be explained through neurophysiology. Theories that Robert Forman championed on pure consciousness attracted particular attention in the 1990s.
4. See Mary Midgley, "The Origins of Ethics," in *A Companion to Ethics,* edited by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 1993), 3–13.
5. See, for example, David R. Blumenthal, *The Banality of God and Evil Moral Lessons from the Shoah of Jewish Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999); Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999); and Purushottama Bilimoria, "Duhkha and Karma: Problem of Evil and God's Omnipotence," *Sophia* 34, no. 1 (Special 100th Issue, March-April 1995): 92–120.
6. For an introductory discussion of these varieties of ethical approaches and some problems within them, see the articles in Singer, ed., *Companion to Ethics*.
7. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
8. See the articles on Indian ethics (Bilimoria), Buddhist ethics (de Silva), Chinese ethics (Chad Hansen), and Islamic ethics (Aziz Nanji) in Singer, ed., *A Companion to Ethics*. I too have tried to bridge the discontinuous gap in a number of essays.
9. An excellent discussion occurs in the classic study by Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism: A Methodological Study* (Berkeley: University of California, 1975); see especially the chapters on "Philological and Historical Approaches" and "Modern Irrationalism." For a moral-rational treatment of emotions in Indian thought, see P. Bilimoria, "Ethics of Emotion, Some Indian Reflections," in *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy,* edited by Roger Ames and Joel Marks (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995).
10. See Staal, *Exploring Mysticism,* 67–69, passim. Panikkar is another figure in the tradition of Hindu-Catholic thought that Staal chooses to discuss, although I am more sanguine about Panikkar's sincerity than is Staal. See also P. Bilimoria, "Zaehner's Treatment of the Bhagavadgītā," *Journal of Studies in the Bhagavadgītā* 3 (1983): 87–111. Spivak aligns Zaehner with the same teleological tradition of interpretation of the *Gītā* that Hegel, under the ghost of Herder, had begun, a hermeneutic approach that prestructures the many sins of orientalism, imperialism, and postcolonialism as well. If this is the case, then one might surmise that there is more going on in Zaehner's unconscious—apart from his

own ambiguous personal orientations—than sounding a Samaritan's timely warning to his flock. Our reading of Zaehner in the present has to be more critical than those took place in the past. See Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

11. Again, see Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*.
12. Personal conversation, Honolulu, 1984, East-West Philosophy Conference, and on other occasions. I have also done my own research on Chandrasekhara Bhāratī and the Śrīṅgerī lineage to which I have some ancestral connections at least in a transcendental literary sense.
13. Ashis Nandy has been a leading advocate of this style of psychobiography.
14. Bilimoria, "Śaṅkara's Attempted Reconciliation of 'You' and 'I': *Yuṣmadasmatsamanvaya,"* in *Relativism, Suffering and Beyond: Essays in Memory of Bimal K. Matilal,* 252–77.
15. Quoted by Kripal in chap. 6, p. 257.
16. Kripal, chap. 6, p. 257.
17. Woods, chap. 4, p. 178.
18. Sells, chap. 5, p. 212. What would Zaehner have made of Jami, Iraqi, Sadi, Hafiz, Attar, and other same-sex loving "monistic" Sufis? See, for example, *The Essential Gay Mystics,* edited with an introduction by Andrew Harvey (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).
19. Sells, chap. 5, p. 217.
20. See Nanji, "Islamic Ethics," in Singer, ed., *A Companion to Ethics*, 148.
21. R.C. Zaehner, *Our Savage God: The Perverse Use of Eastern Thought* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974).

AFTERWORD

On the Ethics of Crossing Boundaries in Academic Writing

by Jeffrey J. Kripal

> *The deeper the truth, the greater the controversy it creates in the world.*
> —Hasidic Master Rebbe Nahman of Bratslav
>
> *deconstruction is justice . . .* —Jacques Derrida, "The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'"

IT WOULD BE easy to discuss for pages (468 to be exact) whether or not a particular mystical utterance or ontological system is moral, amoral, or immoral (or in Zaehner's memorable terms, just plain "gibberish"[1]), pretending all along that the outrageous Abū Yazīd with his ecstatic claims to be God, or Ramakrishna in his infanticidal vision of emptiness, or naked Frithjof Schuon in his southern Indiana retreat is some kind of wild exception to the human rule. And we would be wrong. For we as authors and scholars share more than a little with the colorful mystics we study (why else do we spend our years with them?). Like them, we are embodied; we are defined by powerful, largely unmanipulatable hormones, genders, and sexual orientations; we dream bizarre dreams-visions (does it matter whether we "see" asleep or awake?); and we live in constant tension, never quite adapted to the symbolic and natural orders we find ourselves enmeshed in. Not surprisingly, then, our own texts participate, in rhetorically, substantively, and socially analogous ways, in the same historical discourse that theirs have helped shape and define before us. Thus hundreds of years from now, some future historian of religions might look back at *this* text and see it—correctly no doubt—as yet another "mystical text" about the perennial ethical dilemmas of mysticism (or whatever they're calling "it" then).

This is all to say that we as scholars share intimately in the textual discourses we study and that, consequently, we, like the mystics themselves, are both liberated by

and caught in a series of textual strategies, ontological presuppositions, and subsequent ethical dilemmas. As Jantzen has shown us, "mysticism" is always and everywhere a social construction that has been variously defined throughout Western intellectual history, always in relationship to strategies of power and gender. Surely, our own constructions of "the mystical" and "the ethical" are no different. We are thus bound. Perhaps this is why, like the mystics we study, we want to cross boundaries, if not in midnight Tantric rituals or mescalin-induced ecstasies or erotic mystical poetry (although some of us do these things as well), at least in our own humble little heads, where, if nowhere else, we can be free to imagine and to think and to feel beyond our own socially constructed, bounded worlds. Perhaps, in the end, this is why many of us do what we do and write what we write—to be free, to live in another world, to be someone else, to create another mode of being, to imagine other human possibilities, to experience our bodies in other, more excessive ways, or, alternately, in Jantzen's eloquent and more ethical terms, "to write justice and truth."[2]

Before we end, then, it is important that something be said about *our* crossing of boundaries, especially as they have been practiced in these pages, and what those scholarly transgressions might mean both for our own academic communities and for the religious communities whose boundaries we always seem to cross. This is what I would call the metaissue of the ethics of scholarship on mysticism. It is an inevitable and necessary conflict first constructed and then energized by two opposing structural forces: the esoteric, "secret" nature of these traditions, which attempt to occlude their truths behind the varied veils of symbol, silence, self-censorship, poetry, and threat; and the scholar's hermeneutical strategies, which attempt through various methodological paths (and that is what a "method" literally is, a "path to follow" [*meta-hodos*]) to "reveal the secret," that is, to uncover or expose the previously hidden dynamics—be they psychologically, sociologically, or even biologically defined—that work their magic "behind," "beneath," or "within" (choose your spatial metaphor) these particular types of religious experience.

It is, after all, a historical and etymological fact that mystical traditions are, almost by definition, esoteric traditions; this is what the term "mystical" literally means—*mustikon*, the "hidden" or "secret" (and this, by the way, is why I am very reluctant to abandon the term "mysticism," even after all its abuse in popular and polemical literature—its meanings are simply too close to and reflective of the mystical texts themselves). This structural observation immediately raises two interrelated methodological and/or ethical questions: What are the responsibilities of scholars whose research reveals secrets (political, sexual, psychological, historical) that the traditions themselves do not want to be revealed? And how are we, as scholarly and political communities, to deal with situations in which these traditions react with attempts to harass, silence, or censor those who wish to "speak the secret"? The individual voice of the scholar or critical thinker is often not welcome here, as Stephen Butterfield, writing in the contested context of American Tibetan Buddhism, has so eloquently pointed out:

> To write and speak freely as an individual is a difficult, precious act, one which is generally devalued by religious and political orthodoxies. But the individual voice keeps faith with a moral code greater than any other commitment: to make an authentic response to our world. However much we may fall short of it, the challenge of this code is constant, day by day and moment by moment. It does not come from any guru, therapist, or church, and it can never be surrendered to authority without a kind of unspeakable mental enslavement.[3]

It should not surprise us that scholars who choose to honor such a code are seldom encouraged to do so by the traditions they study (mystical traditions do not generally do well with "the individual"), are often harassed in various subtle and not-so-subtle ways (like many of the mystics before them), and are often explicitly challenged by both devotional and even academic voices that want to privilege, for a variety of political and professional and religious reasons, the "insider's voice."[4]

It is as if the world is set up to keep the secret secret and the scholar silent. Nature hides itself here behind a plethora of social and psychological strategies and mechanisms, and the hermeneut who attempts to reveal its secrets can do so only at considerable emotional and professional risk.[5] If we accept Rebbe Nahman's proverb that "the deeper the truth, the greater the controversy it creates in the world"—and I fully accept it—then it is clear that the (social) world is set up, as it were, to suppress the secret of things, especially of things religious, and that the scholar who speaks such secrets must be prepared to see his or her work challenged or silenced in some way, for such a silencing completes the esoteric dialectic of the mystical itself—a continual revealing that must be concealed again, which in turn must be revealed again. Such is the dialectical logic of esoteric discourse.

As T.S. Eliot once put it, "human beings cannot bear too much reality." And if scholarship on religion does anything, it forces "too much reality" onto people. Consequently, then, it is often simply too much to bear. Ethics, I might add, is only one or two steps removed from this ontological core, for, as we have seen in numerous contexts in this volume, values follow closely upon the heels of a person's or tradition's closest, most guarded "reality truths." To mix ontology and ethics, then, and to radically question both, as we have done here, is rather like mixing sex and religion and politics (which I suppose we have also done)—it is to ask to be rejected. But it is also to ask to be taken seriously. None of the issues dealt with in the foregoing essays are "merely academic," as we say in our regrettable moments of anti-intellectual laziness. To struggle with historical religious traditions, to ask troubling questions about idealized figures (be they religious or academic, or both), to attempt to find moral meaning in the lives and experiences of paradigmatic human beings—none of these projects is "merely academic." They are ethical enterprises through and through. And they participate, intimately and radically, in the discourses and processes of the mystical traditions themselves. If

they call into question those traditions, it is not to demean or to belittle them but to honor them, to take them seriously. Here, as Tillich and Horne have reminded us, the rationality and critical skepticism of the scholar bear a more than unusual resemblance to the deconstructive apophaticism of the mystic. Perhaps, then, in the end our academic deconstructions and reconstructions mirror and reflect and participate in that which they attempt to understand: the mystical and the ethical.

I close with Grace Jantzen, whose Derridean conclusions seem particularly apt here as well:

> [I]f Derrida is correct that it is precisely the demand of justice which requires the deconstruction of legitimacy, if it is precisely the idea of God which requires the critique of every concept of God, then the deconstruction of mysticism and of contemporary spirituality is an urgent task. Perhaps, indeed, it is *the* mystical task.[6]

Notes

1. R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), xv. Again, Zaehner cannot be read simplistically here: "I know that, as far as the normal, rational consciousness is concerned, he [Huxley] is talking horrid gibberish, but I equally know that I have myself experienced precisely this and the joy experienced as a result of this uncontrollable and inexplicable expansion of the personality is not to be brushed aside as mere illusion" (ibid.).
2. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 347.
3. Stephen Butterfield, *The Double Mirror: A Skeptical Journey into Buddhist Tantra* (Berkeley: Atlantic Press, 1996), 12.
4. For a review essay on this problem as it is played out in four recent books on North American guru traditions, see my "Inside-Out, Outside-In: Existential Place and Academic Practice in the Study of North American Guru-Traditions," *Religious Studies Review* 25, no. 3 (1999).
5. I have addressed these issues as they have played out in my own work on Ramakrishna in three different contexts: "Mystical Homoeroticism, Reductionism and the Reality of Censorship: A Response to Gerald Larson," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 3; "Preface to the Second Edition: Pale Plausibilities," in *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and "Secret Talk: Sexual Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Hindu Tantrism," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2000/2001).
6. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 353.

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